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Helen



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HELEN

BY

ARTHUR SHERBURNE HARDY

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HELEN

I

A LITTLE girl, with bare brown feet and an orange-colored scarf tied about her head, was looking at him, from amid her sheep behind the hedge of agaves, with the dull curiosity of the peasant. What warmth of crimson color glowed under the olive skin! What soft depths there were in the wondering eyes! He thought of the shrivelled faces of the women he had seen bending over the washing-trough below the bridge over the Nervia. While there was yet time he would put a little joy into this one.

He took a silver franc from his pocket and held it out in his hand. The stocky little figure did not move. He advanced a few steps, his arm extended. Her sheep, alarmed, scattered down the hillside, and still she did not move. He put the franc gently in her hand, smiling. The hand closed over it, mechanically, like a trap, but the face remained stolid. Then, suddenly, possessed by some unknown emotion, she turned and ran, as if pursued by one of the wolves which winter drives down from the mountains. He watched her orange-colored scarf till it disappeared among the

chestnut trees, then pushed on westward through Ventimiglia.

He had left the steamer at Genoa in the early morning and taken the first train for Nice. But at Bordighera, tired of dust and smoke and tunnels, he had escaped from his overcrowded compartment, resolved to walk, at least as far as Mentone. After the confinement of the voyage the freedom of the long white road, winding through town and village between the mountains and the sea, appealed to him.

Young and vigorous of limb, his stride astonished the idlers lolling over the stone parapets, below which the fishermen tugged at their black nets. Yet business he had none, for the moment, beyond the joy of fresh air and curiosity as to what new reach of shore and sea the next bend of the road would disclose. Ultimately, indeed, there was business ahead, somewhere on the winding road — business viewed with a certain exhilaration of expectation, not wholly free from dubiousness, business man though he was, accustomed to assume new responsibilities with the confidence of the much-occupied who have always time for everything.

The sun was already low as he climbed the crest under the precipices above the Villa Fontana. The shadows on the eastern slopes of the hills behind Mentone were deepening from blue to black.

As he reached the gate of the villa a glitter of light on the road surface caught his eye. Stooping, he saw a small cross set with diamonds.

He put the jewel in his pocket and walked on, as if he were in the habit of picking up diamonds on the roadside.

Just then a boy in knickerbockers, a small cap on the back of his head, came out from the gate, his body bent forward in the attitude of search.

"Have you lost anything, my boy?"

"Have you found anything?"

The man smiled.

"You are an American, are n't you?"

"You are, too, are n't you?"

The man smiled again. The ready answers came back like echoes.

"Yes, I've found something. What have you lost?"

"I have n't lost anything. But Helen has."

"We'll go and find Helen, then," said the man tranquilly. He seemed to have found more than the jewel in his pocket.

The boy made no reply. He appeared to be made of the same self-possessed stock, pushing aside the half-open gate with an air of ownership.

"I will wait here," said his companion.

The boy looked up in quick surprise. What sort of a person did he think Helen was — a little girl?

"You don't expect Helen to come out here, do you?" he said, frowning.

"Why not?"

Surprised, but not disconcerted, the boy studied the grey eyes of the stranger for a moment, then ran down the path and disappeared in the shrubbery. In the distance his voice could be heard crying "Helen! Helen!"

"I suppose there is more than one Helen in the world," the man muttered. But what a coincidence!

A gardener, touching his hat, motioned obsequiously to the stone seat by the wing-wall. The muttering stranger was clearly not of his race and deserved consideration.

Presently, at the end of the trellised walk, bordered and roofed with blossoms, Helen appeared with her brother. That they were brother and sister he knew from the resemblance. There was also the same absence of all self-consciousness. .

He rose as she came nearer, but without going forward to meet her. Even in the dusk of the trellis the charm of her face made its appeal to him. From the deep surrounding shadows it stood out as from the dark background of a picture.

The girl spoke first, with the same unstudied directness as her brother.

"My brother says he thinks you have found my cross."

"Is this it?" he asked, taking it from his pocket.

"Yes, certainly." The face lit up wonderfully. "It was my mother's. Grandmamma lends it to me."

"If it was your mother's, why does your grandmother only lend it to you?"

She drew herself up with a quick resentment, and as suddenly relented, the shadow of a smile passing through her eyes. The question was so direct, yet so absolutely logical, that it touched her sense of humor.

"Won't you come in and allow her to thank you?" she parried.

"If any thanks were needed, yours were quite sufficient."

It was not a compliment, but a statement of fact, and the smile came back to her eyes.

"I never expected to see it again. It seems too wonderful —"

"Oh," he interrupted, "it was bound to be found by some one, lying there in the road."

The smile deepened to amusement. Was he indifferent, or was he going to apologize for finding it at all?

"Yes, of course, by some one —"

"I call it luck," broke in the boy. "I believe in luck, don't you?"

The man shook his head.

"Not enough to count upon it," he said, turning to the gate.

"But I can't let you go in this way," she said

impulsively. Every defect in her face was forgotten when she spoke. "I have n't thanked you myself yet, and I can't give you a louis as if you were a peasant."

"If you did I assure you I should take it — not as a reward, as a souvenir."

She flushed at his directness, but it was too natural to be offensive. In spite of his matter-of-factness he had roused again her sense of humor.

"Please, Helen," the boy broke in once more, "may I go as far as the bridge?"

She glanced from the boy's eager face to the man's quiet one.

He answered for her.

"Certainly, if you don't mind my long strides."

She made another effort.

"It seems so little just to say 'thank you.' "

"It only seems so" — Then the gates closed between them.

"So that's Helen."

"Yes," said his companion in the same businesslike tone, "that's Helen. You see," he explained as he trudged beside his new acquaintance, "I don't see many Americans."

"No?"

"Hardly any. Of course it's beautiful, and all that — but there's nothing to do. What's your name?"

There was no curiosity in the question, only the desire to put acquaintance on a better footing.

"Fearing."

"Mine's Jack."

The absence of curiosity on both sides was striking. Each took the other for granted.

After a pause, and with evident amusement: —

"It's lucky you were n't a peasant. I don't believe Helen had a louis."

"Does n't she have many?"

He betrayed no guilt of indiscretion in asking the question, and clearly Jack detected none, for the answer came instantly.

"Only when grandmamma gives her one. You see, we're poor."

"Oh, I see," said Fearing, taking the boy's hand in his. He was wondering whether poverty sat as lightly on Helen's shoulders.

They walked on for a time in silence. Jack was the first to break it.

"Helen played for me once in the Casino at Nice while grandmamma was having tea, and I won two francs."

"You seem to have good reasons for believing in luck."

"Yes. Helen would n't own up to it. She pretends she did it just to please me. But I know she would love to play herself. Did you ever try your luck?"

"Not at Nice, Jack."

"Where?"

"Nowhere — where the chances were dead against me," he added.

Jack lapsed into thoughtful silence.

"Did you come from Mentone?"

"No, from Bordighera."

"Whew! That's a good long walk. Why did n't you get a motor?"

"I have one. It's on the dock at Genoa."

Jack was not impressed. The dust-stained shoes had not deceived him.

"Helen and I walk a good deal too," he volunteered; then added cheerily, "We have to."

At the frontier Fearing dropped the hand in his.

"Here's the bridge, Jack. You know you promised —"

"Oh, I always keep my promises to Helen," came the quick reply.

"Is that because you only make those you intend to keep, or is Helen the reason?"

Jack looked up with a puzzled expression on his young face. It was quite clear that he was proud of his sister, and that keeping faith with her was nothing to boast of.

"I don't see any difference," he said, breaking into a laugh. "Good-bye. It's a funny old bridge, is n't it. Is your car an American one? I'd like to see it sometime."

"You will, Jack. Good-night."

Under the palms on the promenade in Mentone Fearing found a motor, and gave the order, "Nice."

II

JACK had returned from the Pont St. Louis in high spirits. So far as Helen could discover there was no particular reason for his enthusiasm except that he liked Mr. Fearing.

"Don't you?" he asked.

"I have n't made up my mind yet, Jack."

"Why, Helen, you don't have to make up your mind when you like anybody. You just like them or you don't."

Helen laughed. So his name was Fearing. Jack admitted that he had asked him. And had he reciprocated Mr. Fearing's confidences? He could not exactly remember. He had merely volunteered the information that his name was Jack — to facilitate conversation. Had Mr. Fearing asked any questions? No, nothing in particular. She teased him a little over this one-sided acquaintance, but without shaking his assurance. Mr. Fearing had said they should see each other again.

"He promised to show me his car, and he said 'good-night' when I said 'good-bye,'" Jack asserted.

"You dear, hopeful boy," she laughed.

"I wish I was going to America with him."

Helen took the boy's hand in her own with a

caressing gesture. She was the repository of all his many hopes and few woes. His wish was preposterous, but she made no comment. Contact with his own race always set Jack's blood on fire. With the dream which haunted his mind she was in sympathy, a sympathy against whose impotence she was in constant revolt. Was it to remain forever a dream?

Her thought reverted to the incident of the day. It certainly was an extraordinary thing — the finding of her cross. At first she had been quite sure that she had lost it in the garden, but search had proved fruitless. And then Jack had remembered that she had gone to the gate with the Princess Ghica. What a dear, fascinating woman Aunt Tatia was, in spite of her plain face with its little flat nose, like the faces in Persian pictures. And what a life she had had, with her husband on his mission to Siberia, travelling in far-away, mysterious regions, living in huts covered with skins, in log dugouts on unmapped rivers, riding long days on a cavalry saddle with strange tribesmen. What a contrast to the monotonous life of the Villa Fontana! She glanced over to her grandmother, reading quietly at the far end of the room. In some indefinable way she felt that the monotony had been broken.

What an abrupt manner he had! "If it was your mother's, why does your grandmother only lend it to you?"

Curled up in the big chair by the fire, she smiled again. The question had gone to the root of the matter, like a knife — yet it was not an impertinence. If she had not asked it herself in so many words, it was not for that reason absolutely unfamiliar. The wonder was, not that he, the stranger, should have dared to ask it, but that he, the stranger, should have instantly laid his hand on the very heart of her secret life, of the thought unspoken. How had he dared, what right had he, to ask it? and above all, why? with that quiet air of authority! Yet she had not resented it. It was so amusing, and so refreshing, like a cool breeze from the sea. She was tired of tepid speeches. The image of little M. Hermite, with his flowered waistcoat and insinuating voice, crossed her mind.

"Grandmamma, did you ever know any one by the name of Fearing?"

The Fearings? Certainly. It was a very distinguished New England family, which had formerly rendered important services to the country. She remembered the elder Fearing perfectly — a very courtly gentleman of the old school. There was a son, whom she had seen occasionally when he was a boy. He ought to have followed the family traditions and gone into the public service. But the times had changed. Gentlemen did not enter the public service any longer, or, if they did, the muddy waters of politics, the mean-

nesses necessary to political success, soon rendered them unrecognizable. For nowadays no one regarded politics as a public service, but only as a means to private ends. The honest man, fearless enough to remain unsoiled by the contagion of his company, was paid for his integrity with defeat. She believed that after leaving the university young Fearing had gone into business. She had heard that he had been very successful — that is, had become immensely rich. To the younger generation success meant wealth.

She spoke with a mild disdain, as one associated with a past age whose manners and idols had had their day.

In the deep chair before the fire Helen sighed. She was familiar with that air of detached interest which stood like a wall between her and life.

"You know, it was a Mr. Fearing who found my cross to-day."

"Really."

"Yes. Jack walked with him as far as the St. Louis bridge. He told Jack his name was Fearing."

"Very likely. Everyone comes to the Riviera sooner or later." And Mrs. Lee resumed her book.

It clearly meant nothing to her grandmother — no, nor to her either. Why should it? Yet something of Jack's optimism lingered. "You don't have to make up your mind when you like any-

body. You just like them or you don't." Perhaps Jack was right. Perhaps there was a surer, swifter instinct, which scorns the commonplace preliminaries to intimacy, — a voice from the crowd one sees without seeing, heard and answered even against the will.

The book had fallen into the lap and the eyes were closed. Opening the low window she stole noiselessly out into the garden.

The garden! How her grandmother loved its every tree and shrub and flower! She had wanted to escape from the stifling oppression of that silent room, and now, in the garden, she wanted to escape from the oppression of the garden itself. It might have been a spot in which they walked together, but by none of its paths had she ever found her way to her grandmother's affection. That was the truth. She had never realized it as keenly as she did tonight. If it were not for Jack, and the Princess Ghica —

She went slowly down to the seat by the water's edge where the sea opened between the oleanders in all its level splendor. Little waves lapped against the black rocks and fell back again — always back again. It seemed as if the next one, rippling in so bravely under the moonlight, would bring something — some news, from the far spaces where sea and sky met.

The night was chilly and she stole back again to the warmth of the fire. Jack had gone to bed.

She would go up and see if he was asleep. Her sense of responsibility for Jack was strong.

"Helen."

"Yes, grandmamma."

"My eyes are tired. Will you finish this chapter for me?"

She went over to the reading-lamp and took the open book — "The Recollections of a Quiet Life."

III

It was nearly ten o'clock that evening when Fearing, having motored over from Mentone, finished his dinner at the Hotel Majestic in Nice. Strolling down the corridor he stopped before the display of jewelry in the vitrine at the entrance to the salon. From the vitrine his glance wandered over the room, filled with that cosmopolitan medley of men and women that haunts the fashionable hotels of the Riviera in the season. A half-dozen scarlet-coated musicians were doing their utmost to render conversation impossible. Should he go in and study humanity, or retire to his own room?

Just then he caught sight of a lifted arm and the beckoning sign of a hand sparkling with rings. The Princess Ghica! He made his way slowly between the crowded tables with an answering sign of recognition.

"You here!" she exclaimed as he came up, — "in this dull place! what a chance! Sit down and talk to me."

She gathered up her train, pushing the vacant chair toward him. The thought that the burden of conversation would not rest upon him crossed his mind.

"I did n't know any place was dull where you

were, Princess," he said, moving the gauze scarf, the cigarette case, and the fan from the chair to the table. "Are you alone?"

"No, Dimitri has gone to the Casino. We have promised to go to the ball at the Prefecture — but there is an hour yet."

"I thought you were in China, or Thibet, or —"

"*Merci*, for the compliment! You exile me as far away as possible. But *you*, in Nice — it is unthinkable."

"I landed this morning in Genoa. Am I so out of place?"

"You are certainly the last person I expected to see here. What is it? not health, surely — or have you abandoned money-making?"

Fearing laughed.

"You have a very sordid opinion of me. But you are right. I *am* here on business — of a kind. Not the money-making kind, however," he added.

"Business, the everlasting business," echoed the Princess, with her queer little accent. "One would suppose we were in New York again."

"I hope you don't bear New York too much malice."

"I? on the contrary, I adore it. But your country is so expensive — for a poor Secretary."

"You make a very pretty picture of indigence," said Fearing, taking up the gold cigarette case. "I remember your Samos cigarettes. May I have

one? Suppose you tell me now what *you* are doing in Nice. Are you on leave?"

"Worse than that, much worse. We are *en disponibilité!* But we are hoping for Petersburg."

"And meanwhile —"

"Meanwhile we are waiting, eating out the life, as you say in English. You are not taking coffee? No? Shall we go to the Casino and find Dimitri?"

"If you wish."

"But I see you do not wish. You are right. It is a bore. We will sit here and — talk business."

"Obviously your opinion of me has changed since you left Washington. You did not overwhelm me with contempt in those days."

"Ah, but I have had informations about you."

"Informations? Am I on the list of your police?"

"Very bad informations." She nodded gravely. "In those days you were not rich."

He was familiar with the Princess's indiscretions, easily condoned, because of her good nature. But the remark jarred a little. He did not wear his money on his sleeve.

She leaned forward on the table with a serious air of friendly interest, quite indifferent to the effect of her frankness.

"Why do you not give up this money-making — have you not enough?"

Her quick interest in the thing or person in hand was one of her charms.

"It's not as easy to drop one's responsibilities as it is to change posts, you know," he said quietly.

"So you will go on in this way, without pleasure —" he made a gesture of dissent — "without rest, then — *tourmenté*, all your life, to the end. Truly, I cannot — how do you say — make you out. To be a slave all one's life!"

His point of view was so radically different that he made no serious attempt to answer her.

"Men have to pay with work the price of power — for which women pay nothing," he said simply.

She looked at him narrowly for a moment, then changed the subject with her usual abruptness.

"And you have not married?"

"No."

"You are resolved against it. I see that plainly. You do not know the proverb of Siberia — the little smile of a woman will undo in an instant what a man with all his energies accomplishes in a lifetime. Some day a woman will smile upon you and you will be undone."

"You add fresh terrors to Siberia, Princess."

"Ah, Siberia!" she sighed, with one of her swift revulsions. "I wish I were there. But it spoils the complexion. See how it has ruined mine."

Looking into the piquant face, he was thinking how much more interesting it was than mere beauty. Little of that did she have, but one rarely thought about it and never missed it.

"I refuse to condole with you," he said, laughing.

She laughed too, frankly pleased, blowing away the smoke between them and half closing her long narrow eyes — Tartar eyes, as she herself called them, like those of Gogol's horsemen peering above the tall grasses of the steppes.

"No, I was not fishing. It is true, it is quite spoiled. Do you stay long in Nice?"

"I think not. A day or two — perhaps."

"You amuse me, calculating time so carefully! You are in Nice, *mon ami*. In Nice time is not money."

"If you insist on dragging in money any more I shall believe you think more of it than I do."

"Oh, but I think of it only because I have so little. If I had much I should not think of it at all." She raised her hand to summon a passing waiter. "A green chartreuse — two?" Fearing shook his head. She took another cigarette, offering him the open case, then settled back in her chair. "What are you going to do with your 'day or two'?"

"I should be very glad to put one of them at your disposal."

She sat up with the eager animation of a child.

"Really — you will do that? Bravo! Dimitri goes to Monte Carlo to-morrow for the shooting of pigeons. You will breakfast with me on the terrace at one, and afterwards — let me think —

shall we go to Le Laghet and sit under the cypresses?"

"You take a weight off my mind, Princess. I was afraid you were going to say Monte Carlo. Let us go to Le Laghet by all means."

"You fear Monte Carlo?"

"I? Not in the least. I detest the atmosphere. I am not a gambler."

"Fie!" she exclaimed between sips of her chartreuse, "one does not use such horrid words. One plays, one does not gamble."

"Do you make these fine distinctions in self-defense?"

"I make them because I am so amiable. Oh, once in a while, a few francs, as one wastes a few francs over a vaudeville. But napoleons, never! — it is not worth it. But I have reflected. Le Laghet is too sad. We will go to the Villa Fontana. Do you know the Villa Fontana?"

"The Villa Fontana," he repeated slowly; "no."

"So much the better. It has a wonderful garden, and belongs to one of your countrywomen. You do not object to meeting your countrywomen?"

"Why should I?"

"Then it is settled. And at the Villa Fontana I will show you Helen."

There was a note of promise in her announcement to which she observed Fearing made no response. What the expression on his face indi-

cated was not clear, but she interpreted it without hesitation after her own fashion.

"You know Helen!"

"I fell in with a boy on the road yesterday. He said his sister's name was Helen" — and then again — "but I suppose there is more than one Helen in the world."

"The man who knows this Helen will not see the others," she said decisively, tapping the table with her fan. "But how extraordinary! You landed in Genoa this morning and already —"

"Nothing is extraordinary when it is explained," he interrupted. "Yes, I landed in Genoa this morning, early. I left my man on the quay, worried with customs officials over my motor, and took the first train, a very stuffy train, overcrowded and crawling most of the time in tunnels. I abandoned it at Bordighera in search of air and sun and walked to Mentone, where I got a car and motored here after dark. On the road I met a boy, a very interesting boy, who presented me to a young lady he said was his sister — or perhaps I inferred it. It was rather dark under the trees, but I might describe her sufficiently to identify her, if you wish me to try."

"Do," she said, with rising curiosity; "it will be amusing to hear you describe Helen. I myself would not even attempt it."

Fearing took up the gold cigarette case, fingering the monogram thoughtfully.

"I had better approach the subject cautiously, then," he said. "Shall I begin with the boy? Just a plain boy, buoyant, frank, self-reliant, quite unconscious of being natural, but with none of the precocity that robs childhood of its charm — and very much in love with his sister. One knows just what sort of a man such a boy will make. We understood each other from the outset."

She nodded, closing her eyes; then opened them wide again.

"Yes, that's Jack. Go on."

He hesitated a moment, taking refuge in another cigarette, then he said quietly, —

"I should rather say another Jack — modified by sex."

She made an impatient gesture.

"That's an evasion, not a description."

"It was too dark for details, Princess."

"But you saw something — tell me what you saw."

A vision of the slender figure advancing under the trellis came back to him.

"Race," he said, looking up; "the quality that would have marked her for the guillotine in the Revolution merely because the rabble have n't got it, and which would have taken her up its steps without flinching."

She drew a long breath of relief.

"You see very well in the dark — better than you know. Tell me what else you saw."

"Many things," he laughed. "A keen sense of humor, self-control, self-will —"

"But most sensitive."

"Of course," he assented. "All blooded stock is."

She leaned forward on the table, crossing her arms before her impatiently.

"Will you please come to the point. A woman's face counts for something."

"Is n't the identity established? I am not very good at describing faces." She waited, silent. "Well — two delicately formed ears, white by contrast, under the hair — chestnut, perhaps — something pathetic in the eyes — and a small nose — does n't it turn up a little?"

"And nothing more!"

"No, not till she spoke."

Her face broke into a satisfied smile. "You see better in the dark than some people in broad daylight."

"Any one can see charm, Princess. It's only beauty that we quarrel about. We only recognize the type that appeals to us."

"But Helen *has* beauty," she protested; "not the sculptor's — something infinitely more elusive — a gift she does not reveal to everyone." Then, with one of her swift transitions, "But there is a difficulty with Helen — she has no dot."

"She has a grandmother."

"Ah, but it is not so agreeable always to live with a grandmother."

"Your sympathies must be severely taxed if they extend to every one who happens to live with a grandmother."

"All the same, a young girl should not be shut up with an old woman. What is a woman to do if she does not marry?"

"Sometimes the woman who does not care to is all the more desirable."

"Not the woman who *really* does not care, *mon ami*."

"One never knows, Princess."

The white shoulders lifted scornfully.

"You are a very foolish person. Ask the desirable woman and she will tell you. But who told you," she exclaimed suddenly, sitting bolt upright, "that Helen had a grandmother?"

"She did. A grandmother is not a secret. Most people have one."

The Princess Ghica refused to smile. Reticence always exasperated her.

"What else did she tell you?"

"Oh, nothing one does not know. That grandmothers do not fill the vacant places — of mothers, for example."

She gave him a look of keen scrutiny.

"You are a most amazingly observing person — and most mysterious."

"Just now I am rather a curious one. You seem to be greatly interested in my roadside acquaintances. May I ask why?"

"Why! *Mon Dieu*, he asks me why! Helen's mother and I were born on the same day, we had the same godmother, we were brought up together in the same convent — Helen is like my own child — and when a house has no cradles —" She stopped short with a little nervous laugh. "Thank God I have not yet descended to lap dogs!" She dropped her cigarette in the tray and began to gather up her possessions. "I see my maid pacing the corridor like a wild animal. She wishes to tell me the carriage is waiting."

He rose with her, opening a passageway between the chairs, taken aback by this unexpected outburst, and followed her in silence.

At the door of the coupé she turned, quite herself again.

"You will not come?"

"I am an indifferent dancer, Princess. I should disgrace you."

"To-morrow, then, at one o'clock."

"At one. The Prefecture?"

She nodded, and he gave the order to the coachman.

In the hall the boy in buttons threw open the doors to the lift. He shook his head and started up the shallow stairs.

"Pardon, monsieur," said a voice at his elbow, "the chartreuse."

He smiled. "To be sure. I forgot it."

His apartment was on the first floor. There

were a number of letters on the table, but he threw open the shutters and stepping out on the balcony dropped into one of the wicker chairs.

"When a house has no cradles." How quickly the mask of frivolity had fallen and the heart of the woman had spoken. He had always liked the Princess. Somehow, in a single second he had gotten closer to her than in all the year of their former acquaintance.

Below, on the flagging of the court, carriages were coming and going. A lackey on the terrace was lowering the huge umbrellas striped in red and yellow. Under the glare of the arc lights the flowers in their formal beds looked ghastly. A tram, clanging its insistent gong, climbed the boulevard toward Cimiez. Beyond, between the roofs, the long lines of brilliant light marked the streets. Farther still was the broken line of the mountains and the level line of the sea. Sounds of music floated up from the pavilion on the quay.

Far away on the road to Ventimiglia he saw a little girl fleeing down the hillside among her scattering sheep. He wondered what she had done with his franc. Then the stupid brown eyes changed, the stocky figure vanished, and Helen stood at the gate of the Villa Fontana.

"A mighty nice boy," he said emphatically.

He went in, closed the shutters, and took up his letters.

IV

It was half past two. They had outstayed the other guests on the terrace, and, in the secluded corner overlooking the garden, were quite alone. The waiter had ceased to hover about the table, and they were left at last in peace over the coffee.

"What sort of a person is Mrs. Lee?" asked Fearing, looking up from the patterns he was tracing with his cane on the gravel.

A smile stole over the Princess Ghica's face. She had her intuitions, and had been waiting with more than usual patience for a return to the conversation of the previous evening. That a grandmother should be the avenue of approach amused her. In this instance, however, her ordinarily trustworthy intuitions were at fault.

"Mrs. Lee? A very agreeable" — she paused to select her word — "hostess. She has a garden, you know — not a salon. It is very diverting to drink a cup of tea there. Like the climate the Villa Fontana is one of the — do you say assets? — of a winter's holiday. May I ask you why you are interested in Helen's grandmother?"

If he noticed the touch of irony in her voice he paid no heed to it. Draining the last drop of coffee, he set the cup down deliberately before replying.

"Because it was to find Helen I came to the Riviera."

"To find Helen!" she repeated, sobered instantly by astonishment.

"Helen and Jack, to be exact. And what I would like to have you do, since you know them so well, is to tell me what you can — what you are inclined to — about them generally."

She stared at him, dumb with amazement. "The fact is," he went on with provoking deliberation, reverting to his designs on the gravel, "the business you were rather contemptuous about last night concerns an estate of which I happen to be the executor, an estate in which Mrs. Lee's grandchildren have an interest — quite a large interest."

"Hector de Chavigny!" Her intuitions were on the right track now.

"Yes. It was strange that I should run upon upon them so, by pure accident, and I am extremely fortunate to have run upon you, since you know —"

"*Know!* why, I —"

"Wait a moment, please. Let me first justify my curiosity. There is rather a peculiar clause in Chavigny's will which, after setting aside a certain sum for maintenance and education —"

"But Helen is of age," put in the Princess excitedly.

"— goes on to say that the executor is author-

ised to increase that sum at his discretion if in his judgment the children's happiness should require it. 'Happiness,' you know, is not a common word in legal documents. Perhaps that will explain my interest in the grandmother."

"And last night you let me go to the ball —"

"You must admit you left me rather abruptly. It was only at the last moment that you told me —"

She cut him short with a wave of the hand.

"Yes — yes — this will, this legacy — what does it amount to — for the children?"

"Oh, as to that I can't say definitely. At the time of Chavigny's death I was sailing for London, but changed to the Southern route to look the ground over. Roughly speaking, from what I know of his affairs, I should say there might be a million or so between them."

"Dollars or francs?" she gasped.

"Dollars."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* Think of it! Millions in each pocket for these children!"

"If you think in francs, yes — that, more or less. But before you answer my question I may as well tell you of one matter on which I have made up my mind already, irrespective of what that answer may be. About Jack. So far as he is concerned it was made up before I left him yesterday. He belongs to another race and country — a country of which he knows little, of

which he has probably no recollection, yet which he longs for and regrets. Just now he's a boy without a country. But he's got the race instinct and I propose to give him his own."

"How fast you go, *mon ami*," she murmured.

"Not any faster or farther than I can see."

A little gust of wind shook the leaves down on the white cloth. Fearing began pushing them about abstractedly with his knife.

"You see, Princess," — he spoke dispassionately, as of another person, — "I myself was an only child, that is, a lonely child. A man can go through a wood without seeing or hearing the life on every side of him. That's the way I went through my boyhood. None of the intimacies which come to the younger members of a large family came my way. That boy must n't become a man without friends and interests, and this is no place for him to waste another day." She nodded, approvingly. "As for his sister — that's another matter."

"Quite," said the Princess dryly.

He was very calm and cool to look at, smoothing out the wrinkles on the white cloth with his knife, his clean-cut, forceful face stamped with the reserve and decision of his New England ancestry. Compelling her admiration, it also irritated her.

"Without really knowing anything about them," he said, returning to his leaves again, "I supposed they were both mere children."

"I see."

"Now if I might remind you of certain things you said last night —"

"Why not?" she intervened quickly.

"Because, possibly, you were not altogether serious — about living with a grandmother."

"About living with a grandmother? the most serious possible. So you thought they were children!" — A gleam of amusement in her small eyes. "Shall I tell you what you are thinking now? In New York you said to yourself, 'I will arrange this little affair of the children with the grandmother'; and now, in Nice, you are saying, 'I will arrange this affair of the grandmother with the children.'"

Fearing laughed. "That's a fairly accurate statement," he said candidly.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she said softly, relapsing into her first astonishment, "what a *coup de théâtre!* To walk into a room and say, 'I bring you a fortune — freedom!'"

"Freedom?"

"Yes, certainly, for Helen it will be freedom. What will you do with her?"

"You are building bridges I have n't got to cross, Princess."

"Helen will cross her own bridges. It is in the blood." She leaned back in her chair, incredulous. "Do you mean to tell me that you know nothing —"

"No," he interrupted, "nothing beyond what I learned yesterday — nothing beyond the fact that they were living somewhere here with their grandmother. Begin at the beginning, please, Princess."

She tapped a fresh cigarette on the table.

"Let me think. It was twenty-three years ago a young American, studying in Paris at the *École des Ponts et Chaussées*, to enliven himself went one afternoon to the Sorbonne to hear a little philosophy. It was quite the fashion of that day to listen to a popular professor who was expounding the eclecticism of Cousin. All feminine Paris flocked to his lecture-room. At one of these lectures my young student, looking about him, observes a young girl who, not being interested in philosophy, is also looking about. Their eyes meet. The seed drops into the ground. Thereafter the eloquence of the lecturer is wasted on them. There is an eloquence more powerful than speech. Nevertheless, my young man returns the following week in order to hear Monsieur Cousin's opinions on the True, the Beautiful, and the Good. On that occasion he followed a certain carriage to the Rue du Bac and adopted the fashion of Spanish *novios* — that is, of frequenting that street and of dividing his time between gazing at the windows of one of its houses and admiring the prints in the bookseller's opposite. Was he rewarded because occasionally a curtain

stirred at one of those windows? Probably. When one is hungry one is grateful for even a crumb. Of one thing I am positive — in distress one becomes devout. Monsieur, although a heretic, begins to attend mass regularly, and in the midst of his devotions the good God rewards him with a glance from eyes containing what is not written in the prayer-book." She took another cigarette from her case, accepting the match he offered her.

"Well, one day of spring, when Paris goes to the country, the windows in the Rue du Bac are closed, the light of the world is quenched and Paris becomes a desert. Disconsolate, his studies finished, having no longer any object in life, monsieur returns to his own country. But on the very eve of his departure occurs one of those things we call destiny. He is walking along the Quai Voltaire when he sees in a bookstall on the parapet a coveted collection of the *Annales des Ponts et Chaussées*. It is incomplete, but on the assurance that the missing volumes will be sent to him he purchases it. The little god who selected these musty volumes for his purpose took good care that the missing ones should not be found. Perhaps you prefer to believe the dealer was a rascal. At all events, they do not arrive in New York, and after much waiting and innumerable letters which remain unanswered, the idea is conceived of lodging a complaint with the Consul-General

of France. It required but a moment's interview with that gentleman to learn that consuls-general do not trouble themselves about such trifles. He goes out, furious, to find a carriage standing before the door. Instantly his dear *Annales* are forgotten — for sitting in the landau of the Consul-General is the young girl of the Sorbonne.

"Shall I put the dots upon the *i*'s"? That young man was the son of Mrs. Lee, and that young girl Helen's mother, Hélène de Chavigny. Eighteen months after, they were married, and among the wedding presents the missing volumes had the place of honor. You knew Hélène's brother, naturally."

"Chavigny? Slightly — in a business way."

The word brought back the smile to the Princess's eyes.

"He adored his sister. He would give her the moon. She asked much less — her lover. That is why, against the protest of the head of the family, he permitted some of the purest blood of Old France to mingle with that of the New World. In your country everybody becomes contaminated. You laugh at what we worship. Moreover, Hector was already estranged from his father. No one hears nowadays of the Chavignys, but it is a name which everybody knows. Every year the old Count made his pilgrimage to Frohsdorf to kiss the hand of Henri Cinq. He wished to set back the clock. Above all he wished to bequeath

to his son his ideas, his principles — another word for prejudices. Hector would have none of them. He abandoned his title to enter the service of the detested Republic. It was during a short leave of absence in France that he persuaded Madame de Chavigny to obtain her husband's consent that Hélène should return with him for a visit. He found her languishing. The sea air would do her good. Did she cherish vaguely the hope of a new life in a new world? Who knows! Hope has its gospel.

"You can well imagine that for the elder Chavigny this marriage was a treason. Contracted without his consent, in contempt of French law, it was also a sacrilege. Having quarrelled with the son, he disowns the daughter. So much for endeavoring to impose one's ideas on posterity!"

Still occupied with his playthings, Fearing listened without comment.

"In those days Hélène wrote to me frequently. All these details she confided to me. It is from these letters that I learned of the birth of the children, of her husband's devotion, of her happiness and the assistance rendered by her brother. I was on my way to Siberia when I received her last letter. She wrote they were going to France, first to Nice to make her bow to her mother-in-law, and then to Paris. *Dieu!* how happy she was! and how proud of her children! She wished to

wear her jewels, to parade them before her mother in the Rue du Bac, confident that they would soften the heart of her father.

"I remember well the morning Dimitri came into my tent, holding in his hand the last paper from Petersburg. Our correspondence had ceased, intercourse with the outside world was so difficult. I knew from his face that he had some terrible news to announce. 'Tatia,' he said, 'there has been an accident in France. The express from Nice has left the rails near Tarascon.' All the names were given. In that horrible catastrophe Lee and Hélène perished. They were in the dining-car which went over the embankment. The children, in the *wagon-lit*, escaped uninjured." She threw herself back in her chair. "You understand now why I am interested in your 'roadside acquaintances.'"

Fearing waited patiently.

"We come now to the grandmother. But tell me first how it happens that Hector, who adored the children, waits to die before thinking of them."

"Had we not better keep to the facts, Princess? I represent Chavigny dead, not living. I used to meet him occasionally at the club after he left the Service, for you know he resigned and became an American citizen. But he never referred to his personal affairs."

"No, I did not know. I was too far away.

When we returned from Siberia the children were here with the grandmother."

Absorbed in her recollections, the Princess was silent. Presently Fearing looked up.

"I think you can afford to be quite frank with me."

She drew a long breath.

"I was not thinking of what to say, but of how to say it."

"If you prefer," he said, sweeping the little cluster of dead leaves from the table, "say nothing."

She leaned forward, resting her chin on the tips of her jewelled fingers.

"Is it not strange that a woman who is a wife and mother should deny to her son the right to confer these blessings on another! To the wife she makes no objection. *Any* wife is an intrusion. She objects to the marriage. There are women like that, who wish to keep what they have, who say, 'If there had been no wife there would have been no accident.' That is the way a woman reasons about another woman who steals affections which do not belong to her! But there were the children. One cannot ignore two children who escaped death by a miracle. So she receives them. That was much, for Jack was a baby, and a baby disturbs the placidity of life. Then Jack grows up, and there is an interval of peace. He has his lessons — and Helen, who is useful. Helen also

grows up, much faster. Men cease to pat her cheek and say 'what a pretty *child!*' They look at her and are silent. And now, after sitting in a corner, she occupies the centre of the stage. Of this crime she is innocent, but she commits it with every word and gesture — even when she is silent."

"Is n't crime a rather big word, Princess?"

The white shoulders were raised significantly.

"That depends. The beggar on the road envies you in your carriage, and envy goes off in the air. You and he go your separate ways and forget each other. But in the family it is different. One does not forget, one cherishes, — and after a time, by rubbing continually one against the other, comes fire, and the pygmy passion of the road becomes a giant. Do not imagine," she added quickly, "any one makes a confidante of me. Helen is too proud, and there is no pride like the pride of dependence. A woman understands what she is not told. Helen has her faults; oh, great faults! To begin with, instead of beauty she has charm — too much."

She caught the passing expression on his face and her voice hardened.

"You think it is ridiculous to envy a young girl the charm which belongs to her age. My friend, it is not the charm which one envies, it is the loss of attentions and preferences which one regrets — and resents. A woman is indifferent to all that

does not cross her frontier. Oh, yes, the faults of her age and qualities, and when the time comes for them to ripen they will be big ones. What will you do with her?"

A little girl, having eluded the Cerberus at the gate, was approaching warily, mumbling furtively her plaintive story of desperate need.

"Poor child!" said the Princess, fumbling in her gold-meshed bag for the *petit sou*.

"I see the motor is ready," said Fearing. "Shall we take the upper road by La Turbie?"

She looked at him curiously. If she expected another answer, she made no sign, and went in for her wraps.

"Really, Princess," he said as the motor swung into the road, "I'm tremendously indebted to you. I don't know what I should have done if you —"

She cut him short with a laugh.

"You would have done what you are going to."

V

THE Villa Fontana occupied a steep slope between the precipices of a rocky promontory and the sea. To this feature of the ground it owed its terraces, its exposure to the sun, its shelter from the winds which, sweeping from the north over its protecting heights, only reached the sea at a distance, leaving a broad and placid band of color along the fringe of the shore. Carriages were forced to halt on the road in the open space between the wing-walls of its massive gates, beyond which only foot-paths, broken by steps, led down to the house and sea.

Like the garden the house also accommodated itself to the slope, being built on different levels connected by stairs and passageways which added more to its picturesqueness than to its convenience. From the hall, cold with its stone floor and marble reliefs, a broad stairway, lined with armor and weapons, led down to the salon — a large room of lofty ceiling, its walls warm with the deep red of damask and its low French windows opening to the sea and sun. Though large, it lacked the sense of spaciousness, its treasures of wall and cabinet suggesting the inability to resist the habit of 'collecting.' But for this it compensated by its air of intimacy, the proof that it

was lived in and not consecrated solely to purposes of state.

It was Mrs. Lee's day at home, and the hum of voices came through the glass doors as Fearing followed the Princess Ghica down the stairs. Lorgnette in hand, she entered with her air of health and good spirits, nodding to her friends as she made her way to the tea-table.

"I have brought you my friend, my very dear friend," she said, presenting Fearing.

"We used to know each other," said Mrs. Lee, looking up into Fearing's face with her smile of studied cordiality — "if you have not forgotten."

"Why should I?"

"Because you were but a boy, and because I have dropped out of life — the old life. It was a long time ago." Hermite, Secretary to the Prefect, in a close-fitting coat and flowered waistcoat, came up softly, bending over her hand. "Are you passing the winter in the Riviera?"

His inclusion in the leisure class amused him.

"No, only a few days."

He had often seen the hunger of the self-expatriated for even a passing contact with the man from home. Here the complete detachment from the old life was apparent. Where, he wondered, were the compensations! Did the uprooted plant ever reach down again in alien ground below the shallow crust into the deep subsoil?

The smile had passed to others, and he moved on, giving way to new arrivals. The Princess at the garden window was beckoning to him.

"Who is that woman?" whispered a young American girl sitting beside Mrs. Lee, a note of mingled envy and disapprobation in her voice.

"What woman, my dear — do you mean the Princess Ghica?"

"Oh, is she a Princess!" murmured the girl apologetically.

"Come," said the Princess to Fearing, "let us find Helen. Give me your arm, the path is steep." She glanced at him with a whimsical smile. "You must not think so loud."

There was a touch of motherhood, of affectionate authority, in her treatment of him — but he took good care that she did not see he was aware of it.

"Was I? what was I saying?"

"Exiles!"

It was quite true. She had crystallized in a single word all he had been thinking. Cosmopolitanism was bad enough, but exiles! What's Hecuba to them or they to Hecuba!

"You are a terrible eavesdropper, Princess."

"I am a Russian. I marry a Roumanian; I live in Paris, London, Rome; but I remain a Russian."

"Does n't Mrs. Lee remain an American?"

She lifted her eyebrows with a little *moue* for answer.

"You think, then, that Americans who live abroad lose their nationality?" he asked.

"I think Americans who abandon their country do so because they do not like the life there."

"As you abandon Russia."

"No; life here is everywhere essentially the same. We migrate for change of scene, for amusement. You migrate to escape conditions."

"Please don't include me in your indictment."

"Please to give me credit for a little discrimination," she replied tartly. "I am well aware you are only too anxious to get back to your bureau."

A heavy-featured man, with a full beard and malicious eyes under his thick eyebrows, the order of Ste. Anne in the lapel of his coat, was climbing the path in front of them — the Russian Ambassador, one of the much-prized ornaments of Mrs. Lee's salon. As he approached he raised his hat and stopped, lifting the Princess's hand to his lips.

"I was hoping to see you, Princess," he said in Russian. "Will you tell the Prince I have some news for him?"

The smile playing about his full lips was not reassuring. She was on the point of questioning him, but the smile restrained her; and without noticing Fearing he passed on, leaning heavily on his gold-knobbed cane.

"Which of you is *persona non grata?*" laughed Fearing.

She flashed him a withering smile.

"He was four years in Tokyo and pronounced Japanese civilization a 'bad translation.' On his return the Emperor asked him if they were talking war in Tokyo. 'Your Majesty,' he replied, 'one does not fight with monkeys, one massacres them.'"

The path they were following ended in a broad ledge where a pavilion, over whose red-tiled roof poured the blossoms of a white wisteria, high above the tops of the ilexes faced the wide expanse of the sea. From the open space in front steps led steeply down through the dense shrubbery, between whose dark-green foliage bits of blue water shone like turquoises. A half-dozen people were grouped about the tea-table behind the brick supporting pillars — Madame Hermite, a fat little woman under an immense hat of nodding plumes; her son, the Secretary; and a few men of the younger set who were discussing the coming motor-boat races at Monte Carlo.

Of none of these Fearing took much notice, so completely did Helen dominate his attention. She gave him a quick glance of recognition, one of those fleeting changes of expression which reveal the rapid transition of feeling, natural and unrepressed.

In the short pause of conversation which greeted the newcomers he saw what he had not seen in the twilight of their first meeting — a

small head crowned with thick hair full of changing lights and shades which no single color-word would describe; an oval face, the nose slightly *retroussé*, adding a charming expression of piquancy to the otherwise regular features; the mouth, a little small, but fresh and frank, like the eyes. She wore a soft white dress, with just a knot of ribbon at the throat, its simplicity giving greater contrast to the distinction of the slender figure.

"What an entrancing spot!" exclaimed the Princess, wedging herself in on the seat between Helen and Madame Hermite. "I do not present Mr. Fearing to you, Helen, because, it seems —"

"Jack has forestalled you," said Fearing, intercepting her reference to the meeting of the previous day.

"Where is that adorable Jack?" asked the Princess, squeezing her hand through the opening of her glove and helping herself to a tart. "If I had a boy like that — no sugar, Helen, you know."

"You adore children, Princess," smiled Madame Hermite under her hat.

"Yes, madame, like the rest of the world I adore all that I do not have. Dimitri?" — in answer to Helen's question — "no, he is shooting pigeons. The poor birds! it is so cruel."

"Yet you shoot, they say, even better than the Prince," ventured Hermite.

"Tea, Mr. Fearing?" asked Helen.

"Nothing for me, thank you."

The Princess offered her case. "A cigarette, then. No? They say many foolish things, monsieur, but they do not say that I slaughter the innocents."

"You have just missed the Ambassador," said Madame Hermite affably. She spoke with a certain air of proprietorship, her interest in things Russian dating from the recent alliance. "A most broad-minded man."

"Humph!" retorted the Princess over her tart, "broad-shouldered."

"But so witty," rejoined Madame Hermite complacently.

"Ah, as to wit —" the Princess's sentence ended in the air.

Helen glanced at Julia. What was the matter? She seemed in a very bad humor.

"You must admit that," persisted Madame Hermite, always tempted into conversational quagmires beyond her depth, "whether you agree with him or not."

"With wit one neither agrees nor disagrees, madame. One laughs — if one can."

Helen intervened.

"You too know Mr. Fearing, Tatia."

The Princess threw up her hands. "Imagine where I last saw him! at an official dinner. Oh, I remember well that dinner!"

"One dinner is so like another," sighed Madame Hermite.

"Not this dinner, I assure you. A most exquisite dinner. Served to perfection — with water! How is one to talk through ten courses —"

"I remember that you did," laughed Fearing.

"Then I am sure I said some very intemperate things."

"Ah, I understand," said Madame Hermite, brightening, "a temperance dinner, a dinner of principle."

"A dinner of intolerance," snapped the Princess. "Why is not one content on so fine an occasion to set a fine example! To oblige a guest to follow it is to revive the Inquisition."

The plumes on Madame Hermite's hat trembled. "When I think of all our poor France has suffered, of all the crimes committed by absinthe —"

"But it is not I who have committed these crimes," cried the Princess.

Hermite came to the rescue.

"To prevent crimes, dear madame, one must suppress the cause."

"Well, then, suppress also money, which causes more crime than absinthe, and love, which is the cause of more crime than either — suppress that also."

"Oh, Princess," he protested, appealing to Helen, "you calumniate us."

Erect, her small head thrown back, Helen re-

pressed an ironical smile. Hermite, his monocle screwed in the corner of his eye, examined the two women critically over his teacup. The Princess, plain bèyond question, but so piquante, her head set so well on her shoulders, and her figure, short, but so faultlessly dressed. The other, quite another type! Slender, almost frail, but full of nervous energy, with the fascination of youth untouched by knowledge or experience.

"Before suppressing all these things why not weigh the happiness they are responsible for — instead of the misery?"

"Dear little book-keeper!" laughed the Princess, patting Helen's hand softly; "if there is any doubt, we will give them the benefit of it."

Madame Hermite, shocked that a young girl should permit herself any opinion whatever, drew herself up majestically.

"Miss Lee," said Fearing, "will you not do the honors of the garden for me?"

"Do you really wish it?" She turned to the two ladies. "Will you come with us?"

Madame Hermite excused herself, the terraces were so fatiguing.

"And you, Tatia?"

"Let us see, Monsieur Hermite, if you can make a second cup of tea for me," said the Princess, not troubling herself to reply. Helen looked at her in surprise. It was so unselfish in her to keep Madame Hermite company — and so

unlike her! All her ill-humor had suddenly vanished.

The Secretary bowed, following the pair with his eyes as they disappeared down the steps. "Little coquette!" he muttered to himself.

Madame Hermite, who drew the line rigidly between the privileges of the married and single states, closed her eyes disapprovingly.

"Young girls nowadays," she confided to the Princess, "are so" — she hesitated for the fitting word, but fared no better than her son in finding it — "so audacious."

VI

It was no new experience for Helen to act as cicerone to her grandmother's garden. Tourists with letters of introduction, who found it inconvenient to conform to a 'day at home' were an almost daily trial. There were also distinguished guests with compensating graces, and an occasional learned botanist who asked nothing but the privilege to prowl about alone. She accepted her charges as a part of the Villa Fontana's routine. But the garden, always on parade, had gradually lost all its intimacy, and she herself was only the introduction to the absorbing guest, as devoid of personality as the manikins in the shop windows of Nice. Even the bit of Roman road, which had known the tread of the legions of Cæsar and the ragged battalions of the Corsican, now carefully guarded from profane feet by an iron railing, and for antiquarians the Villa's supreme attraction, had ceased to arouse her enthusiasm.

But to Fearing's invitation she responded with a thrill of expectation. During all the Princess's chatter over her tea she had been saying to herself: 'Who are you? and what do you want?' He had walked in at dusk the day before with her diamonds in his pocket, made some strange speeches, and disappeared — probably forever.

And now, after capturing Jack's heart, he comes back, the friend of Tatia. He did not look like a man to become excited over the latest bulb from Holland or the newly arrived fern from Cochin-China. She was willing to show him the garden, because she was sure that he was not interested in the garden at all. She was vaguely conscious that something was impending, that for some reason he was interested in *her*. Why? Perhaps the garden would tell, or was it nothing — just another bubble from her own heart, that bursts and disappears!

They had come out upon a seat on a solitary spur of rock by the shore. Above towered the rugged mountainside, uncultivated, its rocky scars covered by native pines. Below shone the sea, its shallows overhung by wild oleanders. Here one quite forgot the flowering borders between.

He had not been very communicative. Conversation, as the art of saying something with no particular object in view, was not his forte. He was standing with his back toward her, looking seaward, as she had stood the night before, and the same feeling that something was coming in from that far horizon took possession of her. His back was like a wall, a shut door, barring her from what she did not know. The impulse to pound upon it, to push open the door, to see what was beyond — how absurd it all was!

"You have n't a word of praise for the garden?"

"No," he said, turning around.

There were lines in his face. They made him look older than by any possibility he could be. It was the same reserved, forceful face she had seen by the villa gate, conveying the same sense of mastery and purpose. It made her feel weak in comparison — but she liked it.

"And you dare say it!"

"Does it require courage?"

"It ought to. Don't you know this is one of the famous gardens of Europe? Not a tree or shrub or plant is missing."

"So the Princess told me. It's quite a curiosity." He caught the faint sunlight of the smile passing through her eyes. "You see," he explained, "I am a curiosity myself. I like things in their places and seasons — palms, for example, where they belong, in the desert, for food and clothing and shelter from the sun. Persons too," he added, turning back to the sea, "where they belong."

The added clause perplexed her, and she harked back to the garden.

"You must n't say that to grandmamma. It's treason."

"I won't. I am saying it to you because you agree with me."

Instantly she was serious.

"I do, I do. We are just like grandmamma's plants, like all the people who come here to play in the sun till the winter is over. That's the world we live in. The other world, the real world, that gathers the olives and trims the vines, we have no share in that."

"Do you think you would have a share in that world at home?"

"Home! Why, this is my home."

"To be sure — so it is."

He sat down beside her. He was thinking hard.

"You were very good to trust your brother last night to a stranger. He is a very interesting boy."

"Even a very interesting boy may be trusted to a stranger who finds diamonds and returns them promptly to their owner — especially when that boy is Jack."

"You each have confidence in the other, I see that." And then, with his habitual directness, "A moment ago you said this is home. Home is the native soil. I have thought a good deal about your brother since I left him at the frontier yesterday, and I have come to the conclusion that his home is his own country. What do you think about it?"

She looked at him in amazement. He was plunging again into the heart of things. But she was not yet ready to take him seriously.

"I think he agrees with you — and that it is quite impossible."

"Why?"

Was he actually going to make her tell him why! Her voice trembled in spite of herself.

"You must ask my grandmother, Mr. Fearing."

"I shall. And I am going to propose to her that he should go back with me." To watch the changing expressions on her face was pure enjoyment. "That seems to you a very strange proposition. It is not, it is a serious one. I came here this afternoon on purpose to make it — first to you, and then, if you approve of it, to your grandmother. You were in America when you were a child. Do you remember your uncle, Hector de Chavigny?"

Remember him!

"Monsieur de Chavigny is dead," she said, holding on to herself.

"Yes. I have his will in my pocket. Would you like to see it? You have the right to." The fog was beginning to clear away. She sat rigid, not moving a muscle, her hands clasped about her knee. "He has left his property to you two — you and Jack."

Property! The thing given made at first no impression. But the giving! She was back again, a child, in the past, when the world was full of love. Death had severed the last link with that world, but love remained! In her memory her uncle was a wonderful being, associated with all the joys of an almost forgotten childhood, but a

childhood which came back to her at the mere mention of his name. He had rarely written, but he had not forgotten! Her heart leaped at the thought. And then the past faded away and the new horizons opened slowly, the wonderful, incredible horizons. She was sitting where she had so often sat with Jack, before that empty line dividing sea and sky — and now there was a Beyond; not of dreams, of realities. She had thought, as Youth is prone to, that if ever anything great came to break the monotony, it would come as Royalty comes, with a flourish of trumpets — and it had slipped in quietly at afternoon tea.

She turned to him suddenly, the master thought on her lips.

"Will there be enough to repay grandmamma?"

He checked the short, derisive laugh with a dry smile.

"Quite enough, if that is a debt she cares to acknowledge."

"Please — wait — I must think — and I cannot, I cannot."

She went to the brink of the path. The ripple of the waves curling about the rocks came up to her through the oleanders, the same waves that had talked to her before in meaningless speech, now full of alluring promises. She let them speak to her, listening, listening heedless of the man behind her.

Fearing watched her in silence. If it had been the decent thing to do he would have stolen away. Perhaps it was. Trouble, whether of joy or sorrow, asks for solitude.

He was naturally given to quick decisions, to rapid judgments. They, and a facile grasp of conditions, had been the basis of his success in life. He made mistakes, as other men did, but he did not often suffer from perplexity. He had wanted to open himself the door to the new horizons, for the mere selfish pleasure of it — horizons not so clearly defined as those he foresaw for Jack. And what he had wanted to do he had done. He had taken Jack's hand in his before they parted at the St. Louis bridge. Once again the purely business side of his mission was fading into the background. No, he was not thinking of the Princess's words, that some day a woman would smile upon him, but somehow it seemed as if another hand — he stopped thinking.

"I am going to Mrs. Lee now. Will you come with me?"

At the sound of his voice she turned quickly. He hardly recognized her face. It was like a flower opened overnight, bewildered by the sun.

"I never could be separated from Jack."

"No, of course not." It was new to him not to know exactly what he was saying.

"Yes, take me back, please. I want to see Jack — I want to find Tatia."

The Princess was waiting alone at the head of the steps.

"What!" she cried in her high voice, "tears! Nonsense!" and took the trembling form in her arms.

Fearing walked on alone to the villa. At the door he met Jack.

"Hullo," said Jack; "where's Helen?"

"She's coming. She'll be here in a moment."

Jack was beaming.

"There was an American girl here this afternoon," he said, his eyes twinkling. "She made an awful break. She wanted to know if Aunt Tatia was a real Princess."

"You call her aunt, do you?" said Fearing.

"Yes. She is n't a real aunt, you know. We just call her so because we have n't got any."

"I see. And what did you say to the American girl?"

"I did n't say anything, but I'm going to tell Aunt Tatia she has got to wear a big *P* on her blouse. Here they come. Helen! Grandma's in a terrible stew about you. Everybody's gone this ever so long."

She stooped and kissed the boy.

"What's the matter?" he whispered. "You've been crying."

VII

LIFE in the Villa Fontana had long since settled into a deadly routine.

Precisely at nine every morning Mrs. Lee's maid brought the tea and toast. Jack's morning habits, like the sun's, were irrepressible. In younger days he had invaded Helen's room and bed, even before the sun, in consequence of which, as also from a desperate love for each other's society, later years found them disputing breakfast with the wasps on the terrace — a breakfast usually preceded by a bath and contest in stone-throwing in a state bordering on nature at a point on the shore Jack had named the Smuggler's Cave and invested with imaginary and bloody legends. This scandalous proceeding, however, once discovered, had been summarily suppressed.

Precisely at eleven Mrs. Lee made the grand round with the head gardener, a tedious dragging tour of minute observations studiously avoided by Jack, who preferred even lessons to escort duty — a duty devolving on Helen.

Precisely at half after noon a Japanese gong announced luncheon, and thereafter the day degenerated for Jack into 'nothing to do,' and Mrs. Lee retired for the nap preparatory to possible callers.

Reception days, although partially redeemed by the absence of lessons, were black days in Jack's calendar, interfering as they did, now that Helen was 'grown up' and drafted into society, with the freedom of excursions into the country.

In earlier nursery times wearisome promenades in the company of a maid or tutor had been the children's chief recreation. To these had succeeded days of wider liberty, daring sorties beyond prescribed limits, productive of many scoldings, false alarms, and anxiety — a liberty finally definitely won by sheer persistence in wrongdoing and Jack's assertion that 'nothing could possibly happen,' and later lost in the interests of society. Jack's active mind was chiefly concerned with schemes for getting away from 'home,' a lamentable state of mind to which home tyrants are singularly blind, preferring to see in all such impulses the workings of original sin.

Dependence upon each other for all that Jack called 'fun' had brought about an absolute sympathy between them. They had exchanged views of persons and life at night under the counterpane. The fact that Helen now wore long dresses and received with grandmamma had made no breach in their intimacy, Monsieur Hermite's attentions and flowered waistcoat, Jack's especial scorn, notwithstanding. In spite of the difference in years he played the rôle of protector and master, even to occasional bullying, the result of a sense

of masculine superiority not inconsistent with passionate worship.

The recent arrival of the Princess on the scene had broken some of the chains and swept some of the cobwebs from the mental atmosphere of the villa. For Helen she was a precious link with her mother. Moreover, she knew her French grandmother, whom Helen had clothed with imaginary qualities by way of contrast with those near at hand. Large-hearted, outspoken, and superior to trifles, Tatia had flooded the leaden landscape with sunshine, and also stirred a quickening appetite for the larger world in which she moved, a stimulant productive of both cheer and restlessness.

Routine being easily disturbed by trifles, on this particular afternoon Mrs. Lee's temper had been ruffled. Jack had discovered the fact, but his buoyant nature floated lightly on troubled waters.

It was a trifle that Helen should linger so long in the garden, where the inaugural of a second tea-table had been grudgingly conceded. The Princess Ghica was necessarily a privileged guest not amenable to formal standards; but it was unpardonable in Mr. Fearing to vanish without taking leave. If he had not done so it was equally unpardonable that he should devote the entire afternoon to Helen. Mrs. Lee was making these .reflections when the door opened and Fearing came in.

The tea-table manner had disappeared. She struck him forcibly as a rather grim old lady. But he was determined to ignore both superficial signs and glimpses below the surface. Grandmothers the world over are supposed to rejoice in the good fortune of their grandchildren. It was incredible that it should be otherwise. Besides, so far as he was concerned, was it not a pure matter of business?

Jack, mystified by the tears, with a keen scent for all forms of excitement, whispered as they went in, "What's up, Helen?" She pressed his hand for answer.

Fearing felt instinctively that he had to do with enmity, that his message would be resented, and that resentment would fall upon the messenger. Having no tact in dealing with nettles, he plunged in straightforwardly as usual.

"I have been trespassing on your hospitality, Mrs. Lee," he began, "and I am a deliberate offender. The truth is I am the bearer of news, of a document — from the late Monsieur de Chavigny."

The manner stiffened perceptibly.

"I never had the pleasure of Monsieur de Chavigny's acquaintance, Mr. Fearing."

"No, naturally, since for the last twenty years or more he resided in New York."

"The important thing," blurted out the Princess, who had been restraining herself all the after-

noon, "is that he is dead and that he has left his money, much money, to Helen and Jack."

A pair of unflinching steel-grey eyes were looking into Fearing's. It occurred to him to doubt Monsieur de Chavigny's right to die or to make a will at all.

"This is most extraordinary. Monsieur de Chavigny has never to my knowledge manifested any interest in my grandchildren."

"At all events he has not forgotten them," said Fearing cheerfully, ignoring the stress on the possessive pronoun, "as this will show you." She took the proffered envelope, letting it fall into her lap. "I am at the Majestic in Nice, and at your service at any time. Perhaps to-morrow would be agreeable to you, for I am expecting at any moment to be called to London."

"Pray sit down, Mr. Fearing" — reaching for her spectacles — "in that case, why not to-day?"

"Much better to-day," assented the Princess; and, making an effort to introduce an appropriate *allegro*, "let us thank God Monsieur de Chavigny cannot change his mind overnight."

Taking the envelope from her lap Mrs. Lee looked up over the rim of her spectacles.

"Have you informed the children, Mr. Fearing?"

"Not in detail. It is quite in order for you to do so."

She opened the envelope without replying. He studied her face as she read, turning the pages over slowly — an unemotional face, with that mixture of will and indecision indicative of stubbornness. Before the last page fell into her lap the silence had become oppressive.

"Grandmamma!" cried Helen impulsively.

"This means much to the children" — without noticing the appeal — "it also means much to me. It raises many questions."

"Does it not also solve some?" suggested Fearing.

"What ones, Mr. Fearing?"

"Mrs. Lee," — he was treading on firmer ground now that heart-expansions were ruled out of court, — "Miss Lee is of age. As executor it will be my duty and pleasure to place at her immediate disposal her share of the income from her uncle's estate. As to her brother, since you have been so frank as to ask me a direct question, you will permit me to answer it, I am sure, with equal frankness."

"Do, I am waiting to hear what you are thinking of."

"I am thinking that he is to grow to be a man, and should have the opportunities, the associations, the preparation to enable him to do a man's work and meet a man's responsibilities."

"You mean that he should return to America."

Her quick penetration took him by surprise.

"I have foreseen that," she went on quietly. "I quite agree with you that this is no place for him. I have known it for a long time. I know, too, he will be delighted. Have you conversed with John" — she never called him Jack — "on the subject?"

Being very slow to wrath, Fearing smiled. "No, but I have been greatly tempted to."

"I can understand that. John makes friends easily." She was folding and unfolding the pages in her lap. "I am endeavoring to look things in the face." Her manner softened. "I am a little confused. My life is a quiet one, and the children have been a grave responsibility. I am not sure whether Monsieur de Chavigny has increased or lightened it. I have realized for some time that John needed a man's guidance. Perhaps" — the ghost of a smile flitted over her face — "the man is found. May I ask — pardon the question — are you married, Mr. Fearing?"

He was at a loss to fathom the implication, but responded gallantly.

"No; there is no Mrs. Fearing, but there is a Mrs. Lee."

"Thank you. There is a great deal to be considered, and perhaps it is better, as you suggested, to defer till to-morrow — you said the Majestic, I believe."

"Yes, the Majestic."

He was genuinely glad for the dismissal. Jack

started to follow him, but Helen held him back, and he went out alone in the tense silence.

At the villa gate he sat down on the stone bench where he had waited for Helen, to wait for the Princess. The late afternoon was just at the turning-point when birds seek their nests and lights along the shore begin to struggle with the twilight. He lit his cigar, leaning forward on his knees. "Good Heavens! what a woman!" he murmured. A colony of small red ants were toiling aimlessly between his feet. He wondered as he watched them what was going on in the room he had just left. At the sound of approaching footsteps he looked up, expecting to see the Princess.

It was Helen.

He threw away his cigar and stood up.

"Mr. Fearing."

"Yes, Miss Lee."

"You told grandmamma I had the right to some of Uncle Hector's money."

"Why certainly — yes."

"I want some of it now."

For a moment he was completely taken aback. The face was so pale and the voice so resolute that the inclination to smile died instantly.

"There is n't the slightest reason — in fact your wishes are an order. I will make the necessary arrangements at once."

"You said you might go to London any moment. Can't you make them now — to-night?"

"To-night!" he said, thrown off his guard. He thought for a moment, the anxious eyes fixed on his. "There is n't any ink within reach, is there?"

"There's the visitors' book in the lodge."

He went in, took his check-book from his pocket and began to write rapidly.

"Do you know what a check is?" he asked.

"No."

"Well, put your name on the back of this and give it to the Princess — or Dimitri, he will arrange it for you."

"Shall I write my real name?"

"Your real name, why, yes, of course."

He had not intended she should do so now, but carried along by the tenacity of her purpose he yielded the pen and she wrote her name firmly where he directed — Hélène Lee.

"Now, don't lose it."

"I shall not lose it," she said, pushing it out of sight in her corsage.

"You are not going to do anything rash, are you?"

"No."

"It's just for frocks, then," attempting pleasantry —" or is n't it?"

"Perhaps. You said it was mine. I have n't got to thank you."

"No; thanks are entirely out of place."

"But I do" — she essayed a fugitive little

smile, the corners of her mouth twitched, and she was gone, leaving him staring after her.

A few minutes later the Princess appeared, out of breath.

"Where's Helen?"

"She is evidently not here, Princess. May I smoke?"

"Do, and give me your light. What a comfort it is!" she said, drawing a long breath. "I am suffocated! What do you think now of grandmothers!"

He made no reply and asked no questions, helping her silently into the motor, and the car began the descent to Mentone. They scarcely spoke till it slowed down before the hotel entrance.

"Is her name Helen or Hélène?" he asked, giving her his hand to alight.

"Hélène, after her mother. But grandmothers have scissors for offending vowels. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing. A little matter of business with a very unbusinesslike person. She will tell you. You will dine with me to-night, you and Dimitri, won't you? Shall we say nine o'clock?"

The portier and a half-dozen satellites had gathered like a swarm of bees. She had to content her curiosity for the moment with a nod of acceptance, and the revolving door separated them. Just within she waited, but his man had joined him, and she went on.

"A cable, sir."

He opened it by the side light of the motor.

"As I expected," he said, looking at his watch. "It's barely seven. Get a reservation for the night express to Paris and wire London I am starting to-night. Be quick about it — I have a letter to dictate."

Then he went to the restaurant and ordered dinner.

VIII

It was not because the Princess's mind was dormant that the drive home was a silent one. Wrapped in her furs beside Fearing, she was building castles in the air, and bits of solid ground were forming in the vast spaces of her imagination before the lights of Nice came into view. What was the news at which the Ambassador had hinted? What had Monsieur de Chavigny's money to say for her? About these two centres her thoughts revolved like the nebulæ about twin suns.

His Excellency was no longer on the active list. He was enjoying that Indian summer of official life when one is honored and paid for what one has done and is relieved of all necessity of doing anything further. But he was in close touch with the Home Office. That he really had news of supreme importance for her she was confident. She was also confident that in his estimation it would not be agreeable to her. There was a malicious satisfaction in his unctuous smile and veiled announcement thoroughly characteristic of him. Having no longer any expectation of receiving favors from Fortune, he found a special pleasure in the frowns bestowed by that goddess on his fellows. He was well aware of Dimitri's

desire for an appointment in the Home Office; that Petersburg — that is, home — had long been the Mecca of her own diplomatic ambition. He had even fanned the flame of her hope gently. Soured by retirement, what a delight it would be to him to extinguish it with equal gentleness!

If Petersburg was not to be, what then? She scanned the diplomatic horizon in search of signs. Her cousin Alexis was Ambassador in Paris. He was particularly fond of Dimitri, and fondness was proverbially near-sighted. He had often expressed the wish to have Dimitri on his staff. It would be just like Alexis's particular brand of affection to ignore her private passion for home. It was the most likely thing that could have happened! Alexis was not a bad fellow, and he was a bachelor. A vision of the Princess Ghica at the head of the Embassy table flitted through her mind. Of course that would mean no real promotion for Dimitri at the far end of the table, but Dimitri was so unselfish! his chief thought would be her disappointment. And, after all, Paris was infinitely preferable to some insignificant distant post, even as chief of mission.

Intuitions and convictions being synonyms in the Princess's dictionary, she had reconciled herself to disappointment before Nice was in sight, and had rehearsed an imaginary scene with Dimitri. Dimitri was so philosophical! She knew

exactly how he would break the news and how astonished he would be at her reception of it. It was here that Monsieur de Chavigny's money came to the rescue in alleviating disappointment, putting castles in the air on solid foundations. For Tatia was quite as unselfish as Dimitri.

On their own account, as well as for their mother's sake, Helen and Jack were very dear to her. She had lost no time after her arrival in Nice in taking them both to her heart, and at the same time fathoming the troubled waters of the Villa Fontana. But just then she was a rolling stone, gathering no moss. How many projects, more distinguished for their altruism than their practicability, she had conceived and abandoned! In the twinkling of an eye all these air castles assumed substance and reality under the magic touch of Monsieur de Chavigny's dollars. Jack's future was as good as settled — he would go to America with Mr. Fearing. And Helen — it was at this stage of her reflections that Fearing, hearing a smothered laugh in the furs beside him, asked: —

"What is it, Princess?"

"Nothing," she said. "I was thinking of that bridge of yours. I have a mind to cross it myself."

She had accepted Fearing's invitation to dinner, and while the maid was at work over her hair she went on with her castle-building. As the dinner hour drew near and Dimitri did not appear, her

scanty stock of patience ran lower and lower. Patience was not in the catalogue of her virtues. At quarter to nine she dismissed her maid, broke off a carnation for Dimitri's button-hole, and went to the door of his dressing-room.

To the world at large Demetrius Ghica was an enigma. He was not fond of its society. People, Tatia excepted, bored him. Women liked him, perhaps because of the indifference palpable under his politeness. Men liked him for his unaffectedness, generosity, and easy good-nature, the latter — according to Tatia — the fruit of a lazy habit of mind rather than of virtuous intention. Yet he was a hard worker and fond of books, often confounding the glib of tongue with unexpected information. Cards he detested, and of conversational nothings he had only a limited stock of the conventional variety. "Dimitri and I are such good friends," the Princess explained, "because it is so difficult to make him open his mouth." His dislike for functions was notorious, yet he was in demand, notwithstanding the fact that he was generally found by his hostess after dinner ensconced with a book in a remote corner of the library. He had two hobbies, sports and Tatia. Tatia was fond of the world, of jewels and the people that wore them; but she could renounce the world for the wild, dropping maid and jewels at the edge of civilization to plunge with him into regions tenanted only by primitive man. Tatia,

too, possessed that secret of good comradeship, tolerance. She could let him alone, a debt he repaid by accompanying her unasked where no pleadings could have dragged him. Immensely grateful to her for this tolerance, he was also immensely proud of her, of all the qualities in her which he did not share. Of her judgment he was sceptical, but this did not seriously impair his confidence, for when she did not go logically to the right end she somehow managed to blunder there.

When she opened the door of his dressing-room he was tying his cravat imperturbably before the pier-glass.

"Tatia," he said, meeting her eyes in the mirror, "have you seen the Ambassador?"

"What is it," she asked, slipping into the nearest chair; "Chili or Peru?"

In the mistaken idea that suspense softens a blow he had intended to temporize. The prompt surrender of Petersburg for Peru staggered him.

"Try again, Tatia; you are leagues out of the way."

"Paris."

He was accustomed to intuitions. They were a daily occurrence. But her nonchalance! She did not appear to be in need of consolation, and he had laid in a plentiful supply of it! Unable to detach himself from the rôle of consoler, he proceeded cheerfully.

"Try to be contented, Tatia. You see I am."

"Dimitri, you are contented because you are lazy. I am contented because I have a good disposition."

She was sitting erect on the edge of her chair, unruffled and mystifying. For lack of the indignation he had been prepared to appease, he let escape a little of his own.

"It's all Alexis's doing —"

She stopped him with a gesture.

"Have you told Fearing?"

"Fearing? No, I have n't seen him. What's Fearing got to do with it?"

"We are dining with him to-night. How it will amuse him!" she soliloquized.

"It certainly amused the Ambassador," he said sarcastically. "He was delighted. He even congratulated me."

The white shoulders lifted disdainfully.

"What did you say to him?"

"That you would be radiant."

She laughed approvingly. "The old hypocrite! I am."

He did not understand, but the habit of taking her good nature for granted asserted itself.

"Tatia, you are a jewel."

"Dimitri," she said, pulling him down and fastening the carnation in his coat, "when you pretend to understand you are positively ludicrous. Listen."

She began with encomiums of Paris. It was not Petersburg, but it had its advantages. Could he possibly have a better chief than Alexis? His thoughtful, rather sleepy eyes on her sparkling ones, he listened much as a child listens to a beloved story-teller, waiting for the climax. He did not become excited over Chavigny's will. He was only mildly interested in Jack's going to America. It was quite the thing under the circumstances. He nodded appreciatively over the description of the interview in the Villa Fontana. "Shall I tell you what I have thought of? — asking Helen to stay with us this winter in Paris." At last he understood.

"That's a large responsibility, Tatia."

"Yes."

"You will have to do most of the chaperoning yourself."

"Naturally."

"And you're meddling in things that don't concern you."

Why? Could Helen be left alone, without Jack? Was n't he tremendously fond of Helen himself? He admitted that he was. The dominant fact was that Tatia, instead of being furiously disappointed, was actually enthusiastic. Tatia always rose to the occasion!

She glanced at the glass, readjusting the flowers in her corsage. "Come, it's nine o'clock, we shall keep Fearing waiting. Do I look well to-night?"

Tatia was a jewel. There was no doubt about it. He told her so again. She gave him one of her smiles of good comradeship for reward and answer.

At the door of the private dining-room the maître d'hôtel stood bowing. There were roses in the crystal bowl and the white cloth was overlaid with a tracery of delicate ferns. But the table was laid for two.

"There is some mistake," said the Princess; "we are dining with Mr. Fearing."

"Pardon, there is no mistake. Monsieur Fearing has left a message for your Excellency" — pointing to the envelope leaning against the bowl of roses.

She broke the seal, reading aloud: —

Dear Princess, —

I am compelled, much to my regret, to eat my dinner on the express for Paris. The 'everlasting business!' A cable from New York announces a meeting in London at which my presence is supposed to be of importance. Please say to our friends at the Villa Fontana that I hope to return in a few days. It occurs to me, however, that this may not be necessary. It might be agreeable and convenient to Mrs. Lee, should she continue to approve of my views in reference to Jack, to have him sail with me. In that case I suggest he should go up to Paris in my motor. My chauffeur is entirely trustworthy, and if you will wire me at the Carleton the day he starts, I will endeavor to meet him myself in Paris or send over my secretary.

The chauffeur has orders to report to you every morning. His name is Peter. My compliments to Dimitri, and to you regrets and excuses.

FEARING.

Dimitri was already unfolding his napkin.

Before going to bed that night the Princess wrote two feverish letters — one to the Carleton and one to Mrs. Lee — and when Fearing's car reported for duty in the morning she was ready, though the hour was an unwonted one. She drove straight to the Villa Fontana and commandeered Helen. Jack? No, Jack could wait. She wanted Helen to herself.

She sat down on the bench just inside the gate, digging the tip of her parasol impatiently into the well-ordered gravel.

"Now, my dear," she began, before Helen could utter a word, "tell me what we have in our head. Oh, I know very well there is something. Mr. Fearing said you would tell me, and I have not slept — endeavoring to put two and two together. He has gone to London. I am not sorry. He wishes Jack to go back with him to New York. I have written your grandmother. It's an excellent plan, very much to the point and very American. Time is so important at Jack's age! Now for you, if you please."

"I am going to Paris."

"Oh! you are going to Paris! Dear me!"

"With Jack" — very firmly.

"A capital chaperon! Pray where do you descend in Paris?"

"I am going to my grandmother's."

"The real one, eh!" The Princess laughed. She was in fine humor. "How many louis d'or have you in your pocket, my child?"

A small slip of paper came from the fold in Helen's dress and was laid on the Princess's muff.

"So! that is it, is it! Ten thousand francs! A fine beginning. My dear, you will do nothing of the kind. I see a thousand objections. To begin with, Madame de Chavigny would be stupefied. She is not accustomed to these American procedures. No interruptions! You wish to go to Paris, to be with Jack to the last moment, to scatter some francs in the Rue de la Paix, and to throw yourself into the arms of another grandmother — all with this *preux chevalier* Jack — a fine programme — highly improper and quite impossible! You need not shut your lips so tightly, my dear. I say quite impossible, because — you are going with me."

She laid her hand for silence on Helen's knee, There was no need to enjoin it. The garden had vanished, its tangle of interlacing boughs, the path dipping out of sight to the sea. Straight before her was the clear, open road, where the garden ought to be. She could not frame in words

the picture at the road's end. What else Tatia was saying she did not hear. What Tatia had said before she had heard unmoved. How little Tatia understood that the child in her was dead!

But Tatia went on, humorously, as if it were a day's excursion instead of the straight road, the road which had no end. "We are ordered to Paris, and you will pass the winter with us. I have arranged it with your grandmother" — Tatia alluded to her letter: in the matter of acceptances to her proposals she sometimes slipped in her tenses — "but we will go leisurely, according to our own notions, and Jack will look after *me* — I give you Dimitri instead. Don't speak, child, or I shall play the fool myself. Go find Jack — tell him our fairy tale. I am going to your grandmother."

She stood up, bristling with energy, shaking her muff free of its wrinkles, like a warrior about to break a lance.

"Tatia dear, I would rather you would not. I had rather speak to grandmamma myself."

The Princess shot a swift glance at the face, grown suddenly grave and determined.

"I believe you are right. I think so, too."

They walked together slowly to the motor without speaking. It was beginning to dawn upon the Princess, what a visit to Paris really meant.

As she got into the car Helen stepped on the running-board, burying her face in Tatia's fur collar close under the ear. The tears were close to her eyes.

The Princess wiped her own briskly.

"*Avanti!*" she cried to the American chauffeur.

IX

AN impartial visitor would have found Mrs. Lee's bedroom in the Villa Fontana open to the same criticism as the salon, overcrowded as it was with *objets d'art* of more merit than appropriateness. Yet, like the salon, the impression it created was a pleasing one. It was a room to live in as well as to sleep in, spacious beyond the wont of bedrooms, its three large windows looking southward over the sea. Through these windows it borrowed the sun, the garden odors, the sea breezes — all the treasures of the outside world. On the west a glass door opened upon a small garden on the same level. Perched on its high retaining wall, its only means of access the wicket in the hedge where it joined the rising ground on the north, it was as free from intrusion as the room itself.

Windows and doors were shut now, a wood fire was burning on the hearth behind the wire cage, before which Mrs. Lee was sitting in the armchair which the maid dragged every evening from its corner before bidding her mistress good-night. She had always prized this evening hour of solitude and peace, the companionship of this fire, which like some intimate and privileged guest, shared with her the hour before sleep. There were guests with her to-night that had not waited for

invitations and whom she could not dismiss. Motionless, her thin white hands resting on the arms of the chair, she stared into the fire, now crumbling to ashes.

A mournful figure!

In her lap lay a letter from the Princess Ghica. Monsieur de Chavigny's will was in the desk between the windows — two bits of paper which changed the entire aspect of life. The hand of the dead, more inexorable than that of the living, had taken the helm.

John was going to America.

She had offered no objections. There were none to make. For many reasons the decision, once made, had lifted a load of uncertainty and responsibility from her shoulders. She had begun to be concerned for John's future, to realize, in a helpless sort of way, that it was time to think of school and vocation. He was getting restless. The energies of youth were beginning to seek other outlets than her quiet life afforded. He needed, too, a man's guidance, and Providence had furnished the man. She had always intended to provide so far as she was able for the children's future. But how? Money was not all, and that little was all she had to give. They were alone in the world. She had lost all touch with earlier associations in her own country. With their mother's family she had no relations. They had never forgiven the American marriage and were

not to be counted upon. Pride — self-respect she called it — stood in the way. To know that the future was secure, so far as material considerations were concerned, was an immense relief. But for the passion to be the sole source of happiness it would be a joy.

To be no longer the giver!

That John should be wild with delight was natural enough. But Helen!

She took up the Princess's letter.

"We are ordered to Paris . . . it will do the child good . . ."

The implication rankled. And Helen had accepted, calmly, unreservedly, with a bewildering decision of will which did not even admit of discussion.

She had never before contemplated the possibility of being left alone. In forecasting the future it was always she that was taken and the children left. With her own life she was satisfied, satisfied to live it as she was living it, to the end. She loved its tranquillity and peace, her wonted ways, the quiet garden, her social kingdom, and — herself. After her fashion she had loved the children, for her son's sake. Face to face with separation she saw for the first time loneliness, like the shadow of a cloud that blots out the sunlight, settling over life — the burden changed to blessing.

Her thought went back to the day when they came to her — Helen a little girl in short dresses,

and John a mere babe in the nurse's arms. A long time ago! Well, she had done her duty by them. She had repeated the words more than once, for she had her conscience well in hand. To-night conscience was rebellious. It persisted in asking her if she had ever loved these children for their own sake, with the love that puts the happiness of others above one's own. It asked her why to-night there was no rejoicing in her heart. She answered there *was* rejoicing — but at its core was a bitterness she could not banish and was reluctant to explain. Why? Were they not her son's children, her only son, whom she had worshipped? — with that worship which grows in proportion as its object recedes into the background.

He had been an affectionate son, even a dutiful one in outward observances. But in all those vital things wherein his tastes and proclivities ran counter to her own he had always had his way. The conflict had begun early, when his boyish dams and water-wheels had tried the patience of the gardener, and his room became a laboratory defiant of the standards of order observed in the Villa Fontana. It had gone on increasing with his ardent love for all that practical and scientific side of life which she neither understood nor cared for, and she had yielded, grudgingly, resignedly, of necessity, till he had gone beyond the scope of her sympathy or comprehension, not even suspecting the sacrifice of her somewhat vague ambi-

tions for him — gone his own way, without encouragement, until little by little she was lost in the background and the man's interests had taken her place.

The widening breach had brought struggle, estrangement, but no open hostility — she reminded conscience of that — not even at the final parting of the ways. For when the other woman came to occupy the first place in his plans and affections, the parting was final.

She was not so unreasonable as to shut her eyes to the inevitable course of nature, nor yet so reasonable as to bow to it. Inwardly she had resented it, resented the intruder who absorbed for herself all she had considered her own and had not known how to keep. She had made the vain effort to keep this bitterness to herself. Does one ever succeed in facing two ways? It was an added bitterness that he had never seemed to see what she called her sacrifice, to realize that the merging of his life in another's had made him still more buoyant, self-confident, and free.

Of his marriage she knew only after its consummation. Was it, after all, her fault that he had never confided in her? On marriage she had her own definite views, the views that come with retrospect and experience. It was perhaps the only subject on which her judgment was more practical than his. That he should plunge into that sea without thought for the future, regardless of every

material consideration, heedless of its consequences, and against the wishes of his wife's family, was a romantic folly — a man's folly and a woman's work! But his courage had always risen with opposition — she had called it wilfulness at the time — and he had met opposition as he had ever done by taking the reins in his own hands. And courage had had its reward. In the desk by the window she still preserved his letters, glowing letters filled with a supreme happiness, the happiness that atones for everything and silences reproach. Then came the end, the real end, in that terrible tragedy of Tarascon, with its ravaging aftermath of regrets and self-condemnation.

At first and for a long time the children had in a measure been a solace and compensation. John was like his father, her own John, sanguine, affectionate, and self-willed. Was it again her fault that she had never taken the lost mother's place, the place that had been taken by Helen?

The white hands tightened on the arms of the chair, and the heart warmed with the craving for what she had never given — affection, free, untrammelled by pride and the reserves of self-will. And now they, too, in the relentless irony of existence were to pass out of her life; for she was not deceived by the word 'visit' in the Princess's letter, and John was to cross the sea. She was getting to be an old woman. She had abandoned her country in her youth, and in her old age her coun-

try abandoned her. It would not know her if she returned to it. The mere thought of doing so was repellent. She could not get into its swift current even if she desired, and having passed her by it was now to rob her of the children of her son. After all they were the only real ties which bound her to earth. The old ones had been loosened, and the new ones — to-night, before the dying fire, they seemed weak and vain.

She struggled awhile with the sense of loneliness, the enervating tide of self-pity, then faced conscience resolutely again. Had she no grievances — against this woman who had usurped her place? against this country where conventions and *dots*, all those wise provisions for the safeguarding of impetuous natures, are commonly set at naught? against the dead man who had given the sympathy and assistance she had withheld and who now reduced her to a cipher? And conscience! Why had its voice always been the voice of reproach, never the voice of warning? Conscience answered that a love shared is never lost, that the abdication of self is not defeat, that she was reaping what she had sown, pain for pain and bitterness for bitterness, — the helpless bitterness of pride which sees too late.

"Grandmamma."

Helen was standing in the doorway, the light from the glowing embers reflected on her face.

"Yes, Helen."

Helen closed the door and advanced a step. The voice was the voice expected, questioning, disconcerting. She was in the mood to throw her arms about some one — even her grandmother — if the voice had only hinted invitation. In the immobile face she read the recognition of their changed relations, of her newly acquired independence. With her own consciousness of it hostility had melted. It seemed to have hardened the heart to which she appealed, and the chill struck to her own.

"I wanted to speak to you, grandmamma —" She hesitated. It was not easy to speak, standing, to the stiff figure seated before the fire. She drew a footstool beside the chair and sat down at her grandmother's feet.

"I want to speak with you — to talk with you. Will you listen to me?"

Her face was pale, the small mouth twitching, but a purpose not to be turned aside was discernible under the question.

"What is it you wish to speak about, Helen?"

What was there to speak about! Jack was going away, life was torn up by the roots, and there was nothing to say! For a moment courage faltered, and the temptation to say nothing, to let it all go, overcame her. An older person, of wiser mould, might have yielded, let well enough alone, as she herself had done these many years. It was another Helen now. The first rush of feeling was

gone. In its stead was this strange, new sense of power — the power that money gives. There was no sordidness in it, only the consciousness of freedom, freedom from fetters, freedom to do and to be. Whether or not she had been too sensitive to it, the oppression of dependence was gone. The barriers were down, the road open. But another oppression remained, the oppression of silence, of repression, the long accumulated load of years. It stifled her. She longed to be rid of it. She could not take a step on that open road till it was gone. Every chamber in her being, so long locked, was as ready to open to the wonderful future as the tightly folded bud yields to the sun — if her grandmother would help her. Would she?

"I want to speak to you about that letter."

"The Princess's letter?"

"Yes."

She saw the white hand, lined with the swollen blue veins of age, hanging listlessly from the chair. She longed to lay her cheek on it. It was not half so starved as she.

"I quite understand your wish to accept the Princess's invitation. It would be very lonely for you here without John. I understand that, too."

Helen raised her head. It was too late to retreat now, and a passionate sincerity, the rash, unsparing sincerity of youth, carried her away.

"Is that all you understand, grandmamma? Don't you understand that I *want* to go — that I

must go — not because Jack is going — wait, please — let me speak first. You have been good to us, to Jack and me. I shall never forget it, never. I long to repay it. Mr. Fearing says I can't with money, and, grandmamma, you have never let me try with love."

"Helen!"

"It's true, grandmamma. Goodness is n't enough. I want love, to have it and to give it. I've never had it since mother went — except from Jack and Aunt Tatia."

A cruel little flame darted out from the crumbling log, hissing fiercely, and as suddenly expired.

"Helen, you are saying what you will regret."

Helen had never spoken in this way before. The revolt took away all power of speech. If it had been the revolt of anger — but it was the revolt of truth, ruthless because so true. Its absolute verity and the honesty of its utterance left her dumb.

Helen shook her head slowly. "No, I am saying what I must, what is true, what you know is true. Are we never to say what we are both thinking? It hurts to be silent, more than to speak. I know perfectly well what I have wanted, to be loved as mother loved me — with her arms, whether I deserved it or not. The last night she was here she took me in her arms and cried. I had never seen mamma cry. I wondered why. I was too young then to know. I know now — you did

not love her. I know it because, if you had, you would have loved me, no matter how unlike her I was. She loved every one. I am not like her — I am like you — I cannot love every one." Her voice softened. "That is what I came to say. Can't we forgive each other for not loving each other — now — before I go?"

The white hand, trembling on the chair, went to the bent head. At its touch Helen looked up.

"If you only needed me, grandmamma — but you don't. You will miss me when visitors come, when your eyes are tired and I am not here to read to you. But you will not miss me as Jack will miss me. I shall be no more than a vase of flowers taken from a room."

The white hand was withdrawn and the face turned away.

There had been a moment, had Helen only known it, when forgiveness could have been given and taken, bitterness washed away in tears. That moment had gone.

"I am not saying what I meant to say. I meant to say that if Aunt Tatia had not asked me to go with her, if Jack had gone away with Mr. Fearing, I should have been terribly lonely — but I should have been happy because Jack was so happy — and I thought if you could feel about me as I feel about Jack, if I could share my happiness with you, I should not be ashamed of being so glad. Papa used to say we owed everything to Uncle

Hector. But mamma said love paid every debt. I know now what she meant."

"Hush, child, you touch wounds of which you do not know."

In the desk by the window was a red book, a book of accounts and figures. On a separate page began a list of expenditures for the children. It was a record for her own satisfaction, certainly not an account for collection. She had never intended it for any eye but her own. If debt there was, love that might have paid it would never pay it now. Her thought travelled back again into the past. John had received a small inheritance from his father, barely enough for student days. She had offered to supplement it. He had not refused the assistance of Monsieur de Chavigny, yet he had refused hers. She had not even known how to give!

"Wounds, grandmamma?"

Helen stood up. There was that in her grandmother's voice she had never heard before.

"Leave me, dear." She made an effort to smile. The habit of years is not broken in an hour. "You need not feel ashamed."

Helen stooped quickly. Since a little girl she had not done what she was doing — kissing her grandmother, with arms tight about her neck.

The white hands loosened them gently. "Go, dear, go — good-night."

"Good-night, grandmamma."

Something told her not to linger.

"Good-night."

The door closed. A few last sparks of light crept in red zigzags over a black ember and went out.

Failure, all failure, from beginning to end. For this was the end. Opportunity gone, as irretrievably as the girl whose retreating footsteps echoed in the corridor.

Book II

X

THERE is a ceremony which confounds the laws of number by pronouncing two one. But which one? In the process of becoming Madame de Chavigny it was the identity of Julie de Trécourt which suffered eclipse.

She possessed one of those loving natures which bend like a willow to the storm — a habit of soul no storm permanently disturbs. Monsieur de Chavigny, with fine, unconscious irony, accounted her a saint, and saints being habitually trampled upon in this world, he saw no reason for making her an exception. He was by no means blind to her good qualities. On the contrary he held them in high esteem, appropriating them, together with her *dot*, exclusively to himself, and wearing them, like the order given him by his king, as personal decorations.

In similar fashion he had taken over and disposed of her two most precious possessions — Hector and Hélène. The former she had surrendered with that good grace which concedes to a husband the right to dispose of a son's career. When, however, in defiance of that right Hector entered the service of what Monsieur de Chavigny called the *infecte* Republic, she secretly sympathized with the son, not because she shared his

political opinions, but rather because with her surer feminine instinct she read the signs of the times better than her lord. Every promotion, which for him was another downward step in infamy, brought her a hidden satisfaction. She had the misfortune to be one of those loving women who gauge success by the happiness of the successful, apart from all purely worldly or political ambitions. Principle occupied all Monsieur de Chavigny's horizon. In his code of ethics it left no place for affection, which in conflict with principle becomes a species of immorality. In her humble way Madame de Chavigny saw certain distinctions between this fetish and the high gods on Olympus. Thus it happened that, while Hélène's marriage was a shock, because Hélène was happy and because her own share of happiness had been so slender, she seized upon Hélène's and lived in it vicariously; and having herself known much sorrow, applied herself conscientiously to the task of making her husband forget that it existed. Even when he closed his door upon his progeny she continued to give him that strange thing, a woman's loyalty — for two excellent reasons: first, because there are men capable of exacting it, and second, because there are women incapable of ceasing to love their husbands after having once surrendered themselves.

When, however, in his turn Monsieur de Chavigny surrendered his marital authority, a

long cherished hope fluttered to new life in the heart of the lonely woman in the Rue du Bac. Somewhere in the world were Hélène's children, young lives whose warm, fresh blood is the only elixir for old age. Lying under the cypresses of Père-la-Chaise, his decorations on his breast, Monsieur de Chavigny would not have been flattered to know that this belated ray of sunshine had waited for his departure.

In clandestine correspondence she had shared this hope with Hector, asking absolution in her prayers for this loyalty of the mother, so disloyal to the husband. To indulge this hope, whose realization was dependent upon a contingency she did not dare to frame in words, to write with her pen the beloved name her lips were forbidden to pronounce, was the blackest sin ever committed by Julie de Chavigny. Hector was not troubled by such scruples. Immediately after the death of his father he wrote that on settling his affairs abroad he would return to France and restore to her the mother's birthright. He had made a will in favor of the children. Courage!

Alas, all these plans had come to naught. Scarcely a month after Monsieur de Chavigny's death Hector's followed, leaving a woman, already solitary, more solitary and more in need than ever.

Sitting one late afternoon in the chair from which she was accustoming herself to survey life, his last letters in her lap, she was asking why

she should not herself endeavor to realize their promises. Initiative had been so long denied her that the thought paralyzed her. In the drawer of the escritoire beside her was a precious heirloom. She had taken it that very morning from the safe. How often she had clasped it about the neck her arms had never encircled! *She* must be almost a woman now, with hair and eyes like her own Hélène.

She rang for candles.

In their feeble light the face of the Count in the portrait between the tapestries looked down upon her. On the table at her elbow was a miniature — Hélène. She opened the desk and, selecting one of the letters in her lap, copied from it the address — Madame John Lee, Villa Fontana, Mentone, Alpes Maritimes, France. Her hand trembled. To write! It was like seeing, touching.

Once more, against her will, she looked at the face between the tapestries.

She began to write again.

For it is written: Love is stronger than Death.

It was at that moment that a motor stopped before the gloomy doorway in the narrowest portion of the Rue du Bac.

It was five o'clock, and much darker than usual at that hour owing to the fine rain. Lights were already burning in the shop windows on either side of the entrance. One of these windows was

ornamented with colored prints of the Cries of London, bits of lace and stray pieces of old silver and china, behind which, in the dim interior, amid a confusion of chairs and tables covered with bric-à-brac and remnants of brocade, sat a little old man whose age corresponded with that of his wares. The other window, under the sign *Delicatessen*, was more brilliantly lighted, as befitted its cream cheeses wrapped in tinfoil, its Strasbourg pâtés and glistening sausages, temptingly displayed on a slab of polished marble.

On account of the rain there were no loiterers before the windows, but as the car drew up beside the curb the occupant of the antiquity shop hurried to the door to discover if possible which of the lodgers overhead was honored by so unusual a visitor. Several of the passers-by also stopped to gaze curiously at the American chains on the tires, and then at the pretty face of the young girl with the bunch of violets in her corsage who stepped lightly from the motor and disappeared under the archway.

The evil-minded might have asked what was the errand of this young girl entering, thus unattended, this somewhat forbidding and ill-lighted doorway. No one, in truth, but herself had at that moment the slightest idea of her whereabouts or intentions. This did not prevent her, however, from ascending the stairs as lightly as she had stepped from the limousine, nor drive from her

face the smile of confident expectation with which she pulled the dilapidated bell rope without the door on the third landing.

A moment after, a thin old man, in a faded livery bearing the marks of careful repairs, appeared, holding in his hand a silver candlestick.

"Is Madame de Chavigny at home?"

The question was certainly one to be expected of a visitor, and the face illumined by the candle was not one to inspire terror. Yet something very near to terror was depicted on the old man's countenance as, recoiling a step, he stammered: —

"Mademoiselle Hélène!"

"Yes, I am Hélène. Are you the Jacques of whom my mother used to tell me?"

"*Mon Dieu*, Mademoiselle — truly — I thought — you are so like — *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*"

In spite of his agitation, Helen was smiling. She took the candle from his shaking hand and set it on the console.

"Hush, my good Jacques. Will grandmamma be glad?"

"Glad!" he ejaculated in a flutter of joy and indecision. "But how to tell her! how to tell her!"

For the first time Helen realized the rashness of her action. It was her first draught of freedom, an intoxicating wine. They had just arrived in Paris and every hour had been a whirl of excitement. The Princess had already written Fearing, still detained in London, that ten thousand francs

were absurdly inadequate for the presentation of an American granddaughter to a French grandmother. She was not in the least sceptical of the results of any matter she had in hand, but she had a strict regard for the *mise-en-scène*. Above all, being very proud of Helen, she took very seriously her own part in the presentation, which was not to be effected without due tact and premeditation. In all this Helen apparently acquiesced. She was not free from a certain misgiving, born of the silence which always attended the mention of Madame de Chavigny's name in the Villa Fontana, mingled with a latent aversion to being ushered into that lady's presence by any one, even Aunt Tatia. At tea-time that afternoon the latent aversion suddenly became an impulse. She was alone. Jack had gone with Dimitri to an aviation meeting at Vincennes. The Princess was out. She put on her new hat and stole, fastened the violets Jack had bought her in her corsage, and ordered the motor, resolved to be her own messenger, to make her own appeal.

It had all seemed very simple till now when, standing in the antechamber, the tinkling sound of a bell from the adjoining room told her there was no time for wavering.

"*I* will tell her, Jacques." The smile was reassuring. "Which is the door — this one?" And turning the handle designated she opened the door and went in.

The room was large and dimly lighted by a few scattered candles, spots of light which softened its decidedly faded appearance. Helen did not notice this now. She saw only the figure in black in the deep armchair by the escritoire. But she had occasion to observe it later, and to feel the difference between the carefully preserved antiquities of the Rue du Bac and the restored article of the Villa Fontana.

She had never seen her grandmother before. The miniature among her mother's treasures was that of a young woman. To the woman in the chair the years allotted by the Hebrew King had already been granted. Yet neither these years nor their sorrows had left upon her face their usual traces. They had robbed her limbs of vigor, as the cane leaning against the chair indicated; but they had ploughed no furrows about the mouth, nor stolen from the eyes any of their brightness. Scarcely had they touched the hair falling about the temples in soft brown curls after the manner of a bygone fashion. Helen thought of a flower growing in an attic window.

At the young girl advancing thus unannounced she looked up in surprise. Then surprise fell away and certainty, the blessed realization of years of hope and patience, came in its place.

"Hélène!"

"Grandmamma!"

Jacques at the half-open door closed it dis-

creetly. Habit and solicitude brought him back with the sherry and biscuit a half-hour later — longer he could not wait — to share in his capacity of old and faithful servant the sunshine for whose admission he took the credit. His hand shook as he poured the sherry, but his wrinkled face was radiant as he tiptoed from the room with a lingering glance at the sunshine sitting on the tabouret at Madame de Chavigny's feet.

XI

THEY were smiling at each other, shyly, strangers still in spite of kinship and joy.

"I *had* to come, grandmamma, — and I wanted to come this way, alone, without any one, even Jack. I have wanted to all these years — but I was not free."

"Alas, no one is free, dear."

"But I *am* free, I *am* free!" Madame de Chavigny looked down into the young face, so frank, so self-confident and candid. A girl, a mere child, with everything to learn. All her own grief had been the fruit of that tree, of this joyous disregard for all the dogmas of her ancient code, this open hospitality toward life. Hers had known so many walls and barriers that had not kept her safe! "I have a horrible feeling that it is because of Uncle Hector's money. I try to hate it, but I cannot. It's that that makes me free."

The brown eyes above her were shining with tears. "Were you so sad down there?"

"Don't say that" — she thought of the other woman at whose feet she had sat a few days before — "I did n't mean that. I was only trying to tell you how changed everything is — everything — the whole world. The first thought I

had was of you, of doing just what I am doing. Yet I was afraid. Did n't you *know* I would come?"

"Know, my child! Was I not writing this very day? All these lost years I have longed for you, only to see you, to look at you as I am looking now — and I was afraid, too. I said to myself, perhaps it is better so. Who knows whether this child born in a strange land will love her old French grandmother? Perhaps it will be one more disillusion, one more than I can bear. I was like one of those stones brought down by the torrent, which finds a resting-place, which wears for itself a cavity in the rock over which the waters pass without molesting it any more. And you" — She drew the head into her lap, stroking the hair with her thin hand — "you bring the spring, the spring that comes to the heart in life's winter, the spring you will not know till you have exhausted your own, till you begin to gather for others the flowers you once gathered for yourself."

Helen could not speak. She had wanted love, happiness — and they stifled her.

"*Tiens!*" — the hand had discovered the diamond cross in its hiding-place under the stole — "that was your mother's. I remember the day her father gave it to her." She touched it caressingly, but brushed the crowding memories aside. "*Mon Dieu*! mademoiselle!" she exclaimed playfully, "when you came into this room you were smiling.

Lift up your face — eh, you must? Well, then, let them come — those tears do no harm." She slipped the cross back again into its place. "That reminds me. Give me the box in the drawer of the escritoire. How wonderful that I should have taken it to-day from the safe! There are presentiments not accounted for by the Academy of Sciences — no, the second drawer — yes, that is it. Sit down, dear, close beside me." She took the box from Helen's hand. "These are your mother's letters — precious letters — I was reading them to-day. You shall take them with you, and some day we will read them again together. These are Hector's" —

"May I not take them too?"

Madame de Chavigny hesitated.

"You wish them also? Well, take them — we will have no secrets; and when you read them you will say to yourself, it is nothing, a bagatelle: but this" — her hand went down to the bottom of the box and drew out a shagreen case — "this is not a bagatelle. Your grandfather presented it to me the day of our marriage. It is a little old-style. Perhaps nowadays emeralds are not set in this fashion, but with your hair —"

"Grandmamma —"

"Come, come, mademoiselle" — fighting her own tears — "we will have no more weeping, though it becomes you mightily. At present, naturally, they are not suitable for you. But some

day, when you are married *quand le cœur dispose*" — the crowding memories had their way at last. "I was at the Opéra, a young girl like you, watching Marguerite putting on her jewels, when your grandfather came and asked to be presented. How I trembled! And now these things remain, while that which is a thousand times more precious passes away."

She dropped the shagreen case into the box and closed the lid. It fell with a little snap, shutting in the memories.

"And your Jack, what is he like? You must bring him to me at once."

"Jack and I are quite different. He's wild over going home."

"Home?" repeated the old lady wistfully.

"He worships everything American."

"What will you do without him, little mother?"

"I shall have you, and you will have me."

"You have no wish to go to your own country?"

"Why do you call it *my* country? Is not yours mine? It was my mother's. I belong to two countries."

"One can really belong to one only, and those who cross the great ocean leave country behind. God forbid it should be otherwise. You are right to let him go. He belongs to another race, the race which adopted my Hector and took from me your mother —"

"But you forgave her, grandmamma, you forgave her."

"I did more, my child." Over the upturned face she saw the man between the tapestries, whom she had forgiven too. "And this Monsieur Fearing, he is good to you, you like him?"

"Jack adores him."

"And you, dear?"

"He guards Jack — and the money — he does n't guard me."

Madame de Chavigny smiled.

"You must bring him to me some day. I should like to see him also."

"He is in London now. When he comes back, if he ever does, the Princess will."

Tatia! She had forgotten her! What would Tatia think! She must go at once. To-morrow? Yes, and the next day, and the next — every day. There was the clasp of strong young arms about the neck, the rise and fall of a bosom against her own, the pressure of fresh, warm lips on her cheek, and Madame de Chavigny was alone — a stray violet petal in her lap.

At the door of the anteroom Helen in her haste ran into the arms of a young man who was waiting to be admitted. He was expecting the appearance of the dignified and ceremonious Jacques when this whirlwind of loveliness and happiness burst upon him, knocking his hat from his hand. There was a stammering exchange of apologies, a

furious rushing of blood to cheeks, a meeting and parting of eyes, a passing fragrance of violets, a patter of heels on the stone steps, and Monsieur de Trécourt, groping for his hat on the dimly lighted landing, was muttering to himself: —

"*Nom de Dieu!* It is the cave of Æolus!"

XII

HARDLY had Helen ensconced herself in the deep cushions of the limousine, her precious letters tightly grasped beneath her stole, when the young man of the encounter on the landing came breathless and bareheaded through the archway, Madame de Chavigny's box in his hand.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he cried, motioning to the chauffeur to wait, "Madame la Comtesse begs me to deliver to you what doubtless in your haste" — the eyes sparkled maliciously — "you have forgotten. She assures me also that what I have the honor to bring you is most precious —"

The color mounted to Helen's cheeks as she put out her hand.

"Thank you; I am sorry to have so inconvenienced —"

"But it is no inconvenience! it is an inestimable privilege, and I assure you if what I hold in my hand is as precious as Madame de Chavigny asserts, I am confident it was not her intention that I should deliver it till you were safe in your hotel."

"Did Madame de Chavigny —"

"Oh, please, mademoiselle," he interrupted again pleadingly, "do not question me too closely. Let us think only of the contents of this precious box."

Helen gazed at him in astonishment. This young man was certainly very amusing, and his speech was the speech of a mountain torrent. She was resolved not to smile, and kept her mouth firmly in hand, but she was at that moment intoxicated with happiness and could not altogether banish a strange delight from her eyes.

"The streets of Paris are not so unsafe, monsieur, that —"

But he would not let her finish.

"That is true. I admit that we are not in the region of Apaches — nevertheless, with precious things too much caution is impossible."

His voice was not insistent, only imploring — the eager voice of a child. How absurd he was! She began to laugh, the low, inextinguishable laughter of youth.

"But I do not know you, monsieur. There is no need —"

"Mademoiselle, I am Jean François Henri — you see it is a long story, too long to detain you in this manner — de Trécourt," he continued, in utter disregard of one argument while hastening to another, "and I am a not too distant relative of Madame de Chavigny, and most trustworthy."

"Trécourt!" she murmured under her breath; "that was one of my mother's names."

"There! you see," he cried triumphantly; "I have the right to accompany you — we might even be some sort of cousins."

"But you have no hat, Monsieur de Trécourt."

Unguarded admission!

"Ah, for that you have no right to reproach me, since it is for you I abandoned it up there at Madame de Chavigny's door."

The lips parted above the point of the small chin, and the firm lines of the mouth broke again. It was delicious to be free!

"Come, then, sit there in front of me and finish your story."

"Mademoiselle, I attribute your kindness solely to this precious box which you were so good as to forget, and if it is your pleasure I will sit here till time comes to an end. When I had the good fortune just now to lay my hat at your feet, I was on my way to present my respects to Madame de Chavigny, who is my godmother — Does my humble tale interest you?"

"Go on, monsieur."

"I reside in Avrincourt, which is in the Department of Seine-et-Oise, a territory which once formed a part of the kingdom of France, and I have come to Paris to take my examination in the English and German languages — perhaps you speak these languages, mademoiselle."

"One language at present is quite sufficient for me, monsieur," said Helen, leaning back in the farthest corner the better to keep his eyes at bay. "As for you, I counsel you to tell your Professor at the Lycée that more than one is superfluous."

"Oh, mademoiselle, I implore you," he protested, "do I look like a collegian! You compel me to state that I am twenty-three, and that the examinations I speak of are held at the Quai d'Orsay in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. I aspire to be a diplomat."

"You will make a famous one, Monsieur de Trécourt; of that I am sure."

"That is as it may be," he said dubiously. "You are not of my father's opinion. He is forever quoting the maxim of Monsieur de Talleyrand. When I have passed my examinations I will endeavor to make my speech conceal my thoughts. But for the present I beg you to observe that if I had followed the advice of Monsieur de Talleyrand I should not now be here —" The motor stopped. "Oh, *mon Dieu!* already! these motors, how terribly fast they go!"

His hand was on the door.

"Stay where you are, Monsieur de Trécourt. You forget you have no hat."

"It is true, I am an outcast, and I disgrace you. Oh, mademoiselle, if we should return for it!"

"Monsieur de Trécourt," frowning, "my box, if you please."

He yielded it reluctantly.

"Some day you will come to my godmother's again — will you not? I am positive she adores you."

The frown deepened.

"Monsieur de Trécourt, Madame de Chavigny is my grandmother."

"Your grandmother!" He took the words out of her mouth.

The discovery, so far from disconcerting him, filled him with joy. "Then certainly I shall see you again."

The frown was now so dark he opened the door instantly.

"Peter," she said to the chauffeur coldly, "you will take Monsieur de Trécourt back to the Rue du Bac. That will be all to-night."

"Mademoiselle," said a voice through the window of the limousine, "I am here like an animal in a cage, but if I had my hat I would follow that frown to the end of the world."

The averted face turned, their eyes met, and the frown melted away. He was too ridiculous!

"Au revoir," he whispered.

With an impulse regretted a second too late she tore the violets from her corsage and dropped them within the open window.

Alone in her room that night, Helen went to the drawer in whose farther corner under the lingerie reposed Madame de Chavigny's leather box. Above the letters was the shagreen case. She turned on the lights either side of the mirror, spreading the emeralds on the white cover of the dressing-table. Very paltry in comparison was

her mother's little cross of diamonds, yet it was the cross she kissed before replacing the emeralds in their case.

Old and yellow they were, these letters of her mother's, each in its own envelope with queer, old-fashioned stamps, addressed in a fine hand and beginning, "Chère petite maman." She thrust them back hurriedly into the drawer at the sound of footsteps.

It was only Jack, coming, as he always did before going to bed, to relate his adventures and confess his sins.

He stretched himself out on the hearth-rug before the fire, full of aviation marvels, in which he thought Helen lacked a decent interest. She had on a new négligé, not made in the Villa Fontana, of which he highly approved, and he promised cheerfully to go with her the next afternoon to Madame de Chavigny's, although his experience with grandmothers did not excite his enthusiasm.

Lying on his stomach, elbows on rug and chin in hands, his eyes fixed admiringly on the négligé, he suddenly broke out with: "Helen, do you remember that day we went to Dolceaqua?"

"Yes, Jack. Why?"

"And do you remember that little boy we found asleep under the olive tree at Camporosso?"

"Yes."

"You said he was so beautiful you wanted to kiss him — and I would n't let you."

"What makes you think of that, Jack?"

Jack sat up. "You were ever so much younger then, Helen."

"Yes, of course."

"Ever so much. Say, Helen."

"What?"

"You look just the way you did then — ever so much younger."

"That's nonsense, Jack. I'm ever so much older."

"You do; it is n't nonsense. And the funny thing is you seem so much older — so do I."

"You had better go to bed, Jack, if you want to grow up to be really old."

Jack rose, yawned, and went over and kissed her — grandiloquently.

"I'm glad I did n't let you kiss that boy."

"Why?" she laughed.

"Oh, I don't know. How he jumped when I dropped that olive on his chin!"

"Jack, you're a horrid boy."

"I know I am, and you're a —" He finished the sentence with another longer kiss, this time in the curves of the neck. "Good-night."

After he had gone she went back to the letters — not her mother's, Hector's. What did her grandmother mean by saying it was only a bagatelle?

There were only two — one a message for a name-day, the other dated only a year ago.

I have to-day made a will, following your instructions. You say you want nothing but my love. How can I give you what you have already? And that it is your wish that all should go to Hélène's children. So be it. That was also my wish, which I now carry out with your approbation.

A bagatelle! O grandmamma, grandmamma!

And I think I have selected some one in whom we may have confidence to carry out our wishes when we two are no longer here.

She thrust the letter quickly into the box, slipped from one négligé into another, turned out the lights, and stole into bed.

Oh, yes, she remembered that day at Camporosso, the wide valley warm with color, the stuccoed houses splashed with yellow, the red tiles of the campanile of San Sebastiano, and the green waters of the Nervia hurrying to the blue sea. She could hear now the rickety old omnibus rumbling by, its axles groaning under its load of peasants. The leaves of the olives were silvery in the sun — and the little boy asleep — what a tease Jack was! And farther on, just beyond the bend in the road, the sun had disappeared, the valley narrowed and deepened, the Nervia became a rocky torrent, and the twin towers of the Doria appeared above the black roofs of Dolceaqua. She had wanted to go back, but Jack would go on, into the twilight of the narrow streets slippery with oil, up the steps under the vaulted passage to the bastions of the

castle, past the men lounging before the wine-shop, the children playing in the damp doorways, the women washing in the river above the mill. How far and long ago it seemed! They were *real* children then, truants, too, whose raid had cost them liberty for weeks afterward; and Jack, ever indignant at wrongs, had been caught in the act of writing a letter to the mythical French grandmother whom he vaguely classified with Santa Claus and other unseen deities of his childish Pantheon. She smiled at the recollection, back again on the tabouret in the Rue du Bac. "One can belong to only one country." The curly-headed boy asleep under the olives was no kin of hers. No ancestors of hers had harvested the chestnuts on those rocky slopes. What was her country? Not Dolceaqua — the eyes began to close, the mind began to wander. For the second time a man — this time a mere boy — what a persistent ridiculous boy! — had brought her jewels. A voice in the far distance droned, "I am Jean François Henri —" the lips curved again in a smile, the veils of sleep fell softly one by one, and the grim Doria towers, looking down above Dolceaqua, indifferent to time, contemptuous of the present, grew dim and disappeared.

"Dimitri," the Princess, also in négligé, was that moment saying, "imagine where Helen has been this afternoon — alone."

"To her grandmother's."

"She told you!" There was a hint of jealousy in the voice.

"No."

"You don't mean to say you guessed it!"

"Where else should she go alone? It has been in her eyes ever since we left Nice."

Tatia winced. Her plans had gone astray. She could not reasonably complain, though she had thought to cross that bridge herself. Was Helen getting out of hand?

"She brought back the Chavigny emeralds with her."

" Did she? " said Dimitri, not at all impressed. "She deserves them."

What else Helen brought back the Princess did not say, though she was at the window when the motor returned.

XIII

FEARING'S face, as he came down the grand staircase of the Carleton, wore the abstracted expression of a man who is uncertain what to do. He had a bundle of cables and unopened letters in his hand not in keeping with his evening dress. He had been in the City all day, and the bundle was proof that evening dress had not wholly divorced him from City affairs. It was in his mind to look over his correspondence between the courses of his dinner, dinner not being for him a necessarily solemn function of purely physical enjoyment. Perhaps, afterwards, he would stroll out in search of an hour's distraction at the nearest theatre.

He sat down quietly at a table in a remote corner of the restaurant, laid his mail beside his plate, and opened the uppermost of its variously assorted documents. It happened to be a laconic note from the Princess Ghica announcing the fact that they had secured an apartment in a desirable quarter, and suggesting that the inroads of the Rue de la Paix on his check required attention. She was not speaking for Helen, but merely "as a business woman to a business man —" the adjectives underlined — who would recognize the

necessity for definite arrangements. She could not be expected to assume the responsibility for Helen with one foot in the air!

He put the letter down and took up another. The waiter handed him the menu obsequiously. Assertiveness in its blatant forms was not one of his characteristics. There was nothing of conscious self-importance in his manner. But there was something about him which the discerning servitor always detected as worth instant and unremitting attention. He ordered his dinner without reference to the menu, the open letter in his hand, untroubled by the perplexities of choice, and shook his head at the maître-d'hôtel who spread the wine-list before him at its most attractive page.

Halfway through this disposition of dinner and business, a short, thick-set man with his hands in his pockets and a waist line which proclaimed dinner to be his chief quest, sauntered through the doorway. He stopped here and there to exchange a greeting, but his small, quick eye had detected the occupant of the table in the corner.

"Well, by all the gods!" he exclaimed, reaching out a short, thick hand.

"Hullo, Jim," said Fearing; "glad to see you. Are you dining?"

"Dining! of course I'm dining. What do you suppose I'm here for?"

"Sit down and dine then," said Fearing.

"Well, well, it's good to see you. Alone, as usual?"

"For the present, yes."

"For the present! Where's Mrs. Fearing?"

"She's not in sight yet. Where's Mrs. Jim?"

"Paris — bound for Egypt — where I ought to be, out of this damned beastly fog."

"New York for winter sunshine, Jim."

"That's so. Best winter climate in the world if you don't mind the thermometer. I'd almost forgotten it."

"You've bought over here, have n't you?"

"Yes, anchored fast. Town house — shut up now — moor in Scotland. Madge'll never go back."

"Given up painting."

"Oh, no, but between you and me, you know, — I don't mind confessing it, — I've done with the money end of the brush. Got a studio on the top floor where the men smoke after dinner — tapestry, men in armor, and all that sort of thing. The women love it. Madge serves tea there in the afternoon, and the whiskey-and-soda's on the sideboard. The grubbing days are over."

"So I've heard. You should n't have married money, Jim. It's sure death to work."

"Yes, of course. But what's work for — money, is n't it? I've got the money without the work. Come, now, what else are *you* working for?"

"Work's sake, I suppose."

"All bosh — sheer nonsense, and you know it. When Madge played the angel she turned the Garden of Eden story upside down — drove me in instead of out."

"I'm glad you're on the side of the gate you like," Fearing said dryly.

"Oysters!" said Jim to the waiter; "no, that's one thing I can't stand. Copperheads!"

"Don't raise international questions," interposed Fearing.

Jim gave his order and crossed his arms on the table enquiringly.

"What's up? Awfully sorry the house is closed. Shall I put you up at the club?"

"Thanks; I'm crossing to-morrow."

"Channel or pond?"

"Channel."

Jim glanced at the letters. "Not *work* over there."

"No; a little run with the motor before going home."

"What, alone!"

"No, not alone."

The turtle soup paused halfway to the lips.

"Hope I'm not inquisitive."

"Not a bit. I've got my family over there."

"Oh, I see" — quite satisfied and dropping the subject discreetly — "family of one."

"No, two — a boy and a girl."

"The devil you say!" Curiosity legitimate again. "Where'd you pick them up?"

"I did n't. To be strictly truthful they picked me up."

Mystified, Jim wavered between the soup and curiosity. Having no longer any business of his own, his interest was keen in that of others.

"Picked *you* up! What do you mean?"

Fearing bowed to the inevitable.

"Do you remember Chavigny in New York?"

"Chavigny? Certainly. Used to be Consul-General — remember him well. What's he got to do with it?"

"Nothing now, Jim," smiled Fearing, enjoying the pertinacity. "He's dead."

"Is that so! Fine old chap, Chavigny was. Had a devilish pretty sister, too, — killed in a wreck over here, was n't she?"

"Yes; these are her children."

"Oh, I see" — not seeing at all. "Where do you come in?"

"As executor."

"Chavigny's? Did n't know he had any money. There was a family row there somewhere, was n't there? Oh, yes, I remember now all about it. Made quite a stir, that accident did. Madge saw the grandmother once. Has a regular botanical garden somewhere on the Riviera. Stiff old lady! Why did n't you leave the kids with her?"

"I did n't wish to."

"Oh, motor trip's for them, eh?"

Fearing, who was smoking now, leaned back and surveyed his friend meditatively. There was nothing to suggest the table manners of the Zoological Garden, but there was the same intense satisfaction.

"For the boy, yes. I am taking him back with me."

"Humph! Girl must be pretty if she's anything like her mother."

"Pretty is n't exactly the word, Jim."

The diminutive was no evidence of affectionate familiarity. James Stuart, one-time artist, was 'Jim' to everybody. It was as impossible to ascend to formal 'James' as it would be to address the French bulldog Bob on the bearskin in Mr. Stuart's studio as 'Robert.' Neither the dog nor his master resented the diminutive as implying a disparaging condescension.

Jim laid down the weapons with which he was attacking the duck and looked over at Fearing paternally. He was by far the older of the two and inclined to advice on worldly topics.

"My boy," he began, waving his fork to enforce the statement —

"There's no occasion to worry about that," said Fearing shortly.

"Oh, fatherly interest, is it?" Jim retreated in good order. "You can't shut your eyes to sex," he said sententiously, steering his way out through

generalities. "Always get beaten at that. Better give it a wide berth. The women have got the Government groggy over here. After they've abolished all the differences they can — well, there's no use talking. They'll rouse the old Adam in us yet, before they get through — makes me clench my fist every time I see one — and I'm a decent fellow. Say, Fearing," changing the subject abruptly, "I'm glad I ran across you. You're the very man I wanted to see. May I ask you a question?"

"You've asked me a good many already."

"This is another sort, your kind. Do you know anything about Colombo Limited?"

"Yes."

"Madge has a lot of it — preference shares."

"Sell it."

"But it's going up."

"That's the reason."

"Is that a straight tip?"

"It's no tip at all. You asked me a question. I answered it. Now I'll ask you one. I had a mind to drop into the Criterion this evening. Is it worth while?"

"Bully. I would n't mind seeing it again myself."

"Well, finish your dinner. I'll leave these papers with my secretary and join you in the lobby. We'll go together."

Jim drained the whiskey-and-soda, lighted his

cigar, and strolled out through the door. "Damned funny fellow, but straight," he muttered to himself. "I'll sell that stuff to-morrow."

"Who's your solemn friend?" asked an acquaintance at a table of ladies as he passed by.

"Fearing — New York. Say, got any Colombo Limited?"

"Yes, a little. Why?"

"Chuck it."

"But it's going up."

"That's the reason. Chuck it." And he passed on with the air of the man who knows.

What he really knew was that Fearing's word could be relied upon as the naked truth, without embroidery or omissions.

He settled himself comfortably on the circular lounge in the lobby, one leg crossed over the other. The survey of life from a condition of comfort was his main resource. Life had been a struggle once. He still growled at it, but the growl of comfort had nothing in common with the growl of poverty. Just like Fearing, he thought — to load himself up with a boy. You can thrash a boy when he goes wrong — but a girl! Wonder if he's going to take her on, too. No kids for him! He'd sell that stuff of Madge's to-morrow, sure.

He went to the telegraph office and asked for a blank.

Fearing's here. Going to Paris. Look him up. I'll give him your address. JIM.

"Shall we go?" said a voice at his elbow.

"All ready. By the way, Fearing, you must hunt up Madge in Paris. She's at the Imperial."

"I will," said Fearing.

Mr. Stuart's conversational talents were necessarily suspended during the three acts at the Criterion. The stage absorbed his undivided attention. Fearing, not so easily entertained, utilized the respite in reflections — reflections suggested chiefly by the conversation at the dinner table. Why *had n't* he left Jack with his grandmother? Why had he picked up, as Jim phrased it, a strange boy, found on the roadside between Mentone and Ventimiglia, instead of sending a monthly check to his natural guardian? The answer to that question came instantly: because it was for the boy's good, and because he wanted him to have what was good for him. Was there any other reason? When he made up his mind about Jack, it had not occurred to him that he would become in any way involved with Helen. Certainly not. Interest in Jack stopped with Jack. What had happened afterwards? Looking the problem squarely in the face, as was his wont, he found himself looking into the face of Helen — Helen under the trellis at the gate of the Villa Fontana, Helen hurrying down the path from the lodge with his check in her bosom, Helen as depicted by the Princess Ghica. Of course he was interested in her. Who would n't be with such a grand-

mother! No one could help sympathizing with her — sympathy, no doubt, she would resent, but sympathy. He had had the power to put a little joy into her life, and he had enjoyed using it. What had prompted him to invest that franc in the little sheep-girl of Ventimiglia? The same desire to put a little joy into the heart, and, surely, too, to see it blossom in the stolid face — both; they were inseparable. The girl was not a musical instrument incapable of the emotion it produced. What other return was he expecting? None, absolutely none. Having thought the matter through to this conclusion, he dismissed it.

Of the Princess's invitation he heartily approved. Its acceptance had absolved him completely from all responsibility of a personal kind. There was nothing further for him to think of or to do, other than the necessary financial arrangements very properly alluded to in the Princess's letter. It was n't even necessary to go to Paris for that. He could give Jack a run in England — winter was winter there as here.

"I'm going over myself in a day or two," said Jim as the curtain fell. "If you'll wait a bit I'll cross with you."

"No, thanks, I'm sailing in a fortnight."

The inference was that he had no time to spare, but he had not said so.

At the Carleton entrance they exchanged farewells after the fashion of their greeting, as men

who were sure to meet again on some other Rialto, and Fearing went to the office to write a telegram, a mode of correspondence he utilized with national liberality, saying he would arrive in Paris the following evening.

The morning broke grey and sullen. Before embarking at Dover the wind came up, bringing in a wet, heavy fog. The steamer was crowded. Not until the rising sea had driven the more sensitive below could he find a place to sit down. He pulled a chair into the shelter of a companionway. Nothing was to be seen save now and then a white gleam on the ragged crest of a baffled wave, hurled back on its fellows — nothing but Jim across the table, looking at him from under heavy eyelids, Jim, attacking the duck. The obsession of Jim nauseated him. Why had he talked with Jim at all?

He acknowledged a certain respect for the obsessions of others, no matter how preposterous they were. They had often modified his conduct, while not deflecting him from his objective. Ideas suggested by another are not always dismissed readily simply because one has not entertained them one's self. He was not destitute of imagination, no really successful business man is. Jim had switched that faculty off the beaten track — brutally.

Suddenly, where Jim had been, the lighthouse on the jetty loomed up in the mist. He turned up

his coat collar, steadying himself against the lurch as the steamer slid into smooth water.

"We're in, sir," said a deckhand, touching his cap, "and a bit nasty it was, too, sir."

The cheery greeting cleared away the fog in his brain. In a few weeks, New York! And through the mist came the welcome vision of a black mass of towering forms, pierced with myriad lights, and above, white scarfs of steam floating away in the night.

He gave his sailor friend a shilling and began to get together his luggage.

XIV

MADAME DE CHAVIGNY'S best Sèvres service and silverware were seeing the light after years of seclusion.

Jacques, with outside aid impressed for the occasion, had been busy all the week unearthing relics of former splendor. With every surface restored to its pristine brightness he regained a portion of his own youth. When at eight o'clock he stood behind Madame de Chavigny's chair his face shone in the light of the candles no whit less than the candelabra he had polished. Even the faded livery forgot its shabbiness as he moved about behind the guests, still a little dazed that the sun should have penetrated this narrow street and curtained room so long given over to silence. Behind one chair he lingered longest, resentful in his service of the prior claims of a Princess Ghica, *grande dame* though she was, — for to his thinking there was but one real princess present, the princess who had brought back the sun.

She was sitting beside Monsieur de Trécourt, younger, as Jack had said, than ever; and, omitting many irrelevant interruptions on the part of less important persons, this is what they were saying: —

"It is strange that you did not know."

"How should I know, mademoiselle? Madame de Chavigny told me nothing. She seized me by the coat and thrust that precious box into my hands, saying, 'Run, run — make haste!' And I ran. Moreover, you did not tell me till —"

"You talked so fast I had no opportunity."

"But I was obliged to talk fast, otherwise, like Madame de Chavigny, you would have said, 'Run, go, make haste.' Not till I returned to search for my hat — you will pardon me for reminding you of that hat, will you not? — did I learn who you really were."

"It makes no difference who I am."

"Ah, mademoiselle, do you know what Monsieur Taine says of a certain statue in the Louvre that has had the misfortune to lose its arms?"

"What does he say?"

"It seems that philosophers have disputed over those arms in the vain endeavor to discover what the lady in question was doing. But I take sides with Monsieur Taine who wisely remarks that it makes no difference what she was doing, it being quite sufficient that she is."

"Monsieur de Trécourt, Jacques has been offering you —"

"Oh, pardon," — helping himself to the salmon, "I was thinking of that lady in the Louvre. Might I be so indiscreet as to ask you a question? — whether you are pleased to be here?"

"What a question! Why should I not be pleased to be with my grandmother?"

"Then I will make a confession. It is I who am responsible for this dinner."

"You!"

"It was an inspiration that entered my head when I returned for my hat. What! I said to myself, you are the granddaughter of Madame de Chavigny, you have just arrived from America—"

"You are mistaken. It is years since I was in America."

"Never mind; all the same that is what I said, and as I am not yet a diplomat I continue to say what comes into my head. At some future day, when I have reached a grade inconsistent with truthfulness, I will say, 'What do I care where mademoiselle chooses to reside?' But for the present I cannot bring myself to lies and treachery. So I said to my godmother, 'What! she is from America, she is perhaps about to return there, and I shall never have the occasion to apologize for my rudeness—'"

"It was as much my fault as yours."

"'What!' I said, 'she is going to America—'"

"But I am not going to America."

"Did I know that at that time? 'Positively,' I said, 'if you cannot prevent it—'"

"Monsieur de Trécourt!"

"'— if you cannot prevent it, the least you can do is to offer her a dinner.' Oh, we had a famous

discussion! To begin with, you were not going to America. Then, you see, my godmother has not gone into society these many years. Necessarily, I observed, it must be a family dinner. She said she had no gown suitable, the plate was in the safe, the china — you cannot imagine all the difficulties we had with the china! Little difficulties, you understand, such as a woman brings forward when she is beginning to admit that they count for nothing. But with a woman one never knows, so, lest at the last moment she should change her mind, I redoubled my arguments —"

"Have you then so much experience with women, Monsieur de Trécourt?"

"With one especially, my mother, who is, as my father says, all women compounded into one. You see her over there now. She is looking at me. I wager she is saying, 'What nonsense is he talking?' Dear mamma! she has the weakness of all mothers. In order to restore the balance my father does not agree with her."

For several minutes which seemed hours Helen's attention was monopolized by Dimitri, who sat on her right.

"What was I saying when —"

"You were speaking of your arguments."

"Oh, yes. I had many. But the chief one I made no use of."

"Let us talk of something else, Monsieur de Trécourt."

"Mademoiselle," — the voice sank lower, — "you have been kind to me, yet to mention the least of your kindnesses would be to abuse them. Let us speak by all means of what does not interest us. It is inadmissible to speak as children — but, do you know, I have often thought that if we spoke and acted as children do, if we dared to be thoughtless —"

"I was thoughtless the other night, and I regret it."

Monsieur de Trécourt suddenly remembered the violets, a sample of which were reposing that moment in his breast pocket.

"Since you remember it sufficiently only to regret it I am satisfied."

How humble he was!

"Let us not talk about ourselves," was the valiant reply; "there are subjects more interesting."

"But we are not talking about ourselves," he cried gayly; "we are talking of each other." Then Madame de Chavigny rose, there was a sound of moving chairs, and Helen's gloves slid to the floor. "For you, I admit," he whispered as he gave them to her, "it is a dull subject."

"Try to remember that," she said severely, taking the arm Dimitri offered her.

When the men passed into the library Trécourt lingered behind, speaking successively to several of the ladies in the effort to make himself agreeable,

but in a manner so preoccupied that failure was inevitable.

"Monsieur de Trécourt."

He started. The Princess Ghica was speaking.

"Come and sit down by me. You are not smoking?"

"No, madame, not when I have something better to do."

She made room for him on the divan.

"Your father has been speaking to me of you."

"Of me, madame!"

"Oh, do not be alarmed. I form my own opinions, and I begin by making allowances. He tells me you are about to enter the Service."

"Yes, madame. I passed my examinations last week."

"The examinations at the Quai d'Orsay are not very important ones," she said, smiling; "sometimes, in a salon, such as this one where we now are, examinations take place which are of more consequence."

He gave her an uneasy glance.

"Did you ever hear of that bird which hides its head in the sand and flatters itself that it has escaped observation?"

The blood surged up to his face.

"Madame, I beg of you to choose some other subject. My studies in natural history have been neglected."

The Princess laughed behind her fan. She never delayed her declaration of war or offer of friendship.

"Monsieur de Trécourt," she said with a sudden seriousness which turned his confusion into alarm, "I know perhaps even less than you do of natural history, but I have not sat opposite you for an hour to no purpose, and since we are to be comrades —"

"Comrades, madame!" he faltered.

"Yes, comrades. Are you not about to enter the same Service?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot; that is true."

Jacques was serving the coffee. What was this extraordinary woman about to say next? Yet not for worlds would he change the conversation or seek to escape the delicious trouble in which it plunged him.

"Doubtless, like all young men," continued the Princess, "you have plans, ambitions."

"Ambitions, oh, yes, madame — but plans — a poor attaché without pay — he does not make plans."

"Well, then, instead of plans let us say preferences. *Mon Dieu!* at your age I had both. And you are wrong, I assure you. When a man has acquired reputation, has in other words become of use, he is sent where he is needed, without regard to his preferences. But a young man, a poor attaché without pay, who has no reputation and

is of no use whatever, what does it matter at the foot of what ladder he begins to climb! Look, Monsieur de Trécourt, you have put three lumps of sugar already in your coffee. So, I say, in your circumstances preferences are not to be despised."

"Madame," he said, not knowing what to say, and saying happily the first thing that came to mind, "if I indulged in preferences I should not dare to disclose them."

The Princess laughed outright.

"True. It is very bad taste to put dots on every *i*. Still, when one has preferences it is not sufficient to indulge in them." She was opening and closing her fan thoughtfully. "Do you happen to know your chief in the Ministry, Monsieur de Trécourt?"

"Monsieur Coulomb, the Minister, madame?"

"We will think about it. More difficult things have been accomplished. But go, have your cigar —"

"O Princess," he cried, "if I could persuade myself that you were my friend —"

"Persuade yourself, by all means — but not too much. Recollect, there is one ladder one must climb alone. Will you take my cup, please? I see Madame de Chavigny beckoning to me. If you have no engagement perhaps you will come for a cup of tea with us to-morrow at five."

"At five, the Imperial —"

"Well, yes," she laughed, "for the present it is the Imperial. I forgot to mention our hotel, but it seems you are informed of everything."

He watched her cross the room, and hardly knowing what he was doing, stumbled into the library.

"Tatia," said Helen on the way home, "I have persuaded grandmamma to take tea with us tomorrow. We are going to the Bois in the afternoon. She has never been in a motor. We can have tea in the small salon — just a *thé intime*, you know."

"*Intime!*" echoed the Princess, "and I have asked that young Trécourt. What a pity!"

Helen was silent.

"He amused me so," Tatia went on. "He reminds me of Fearing."

"Mr. Fearing!" gasped Helen. "I cannot imagine any one more different."

"They both say exactly what they think," said Tatia emphatically.

"But they think such different things!"

The Princess laughed. "Naturally. Trécourt is only a boy —"

"Why, Aunt Tatia," said Jack, "he's twenty-three."

"Really, Monsieur Jack. What a greybeard!"

"He has n't got any beard," said Jack stoutly, "but he's served his time in the army. He was in

the aviation corps, and he holds the army record for altitude."

"And where, pray, did you obtain all this interesting information? Has Monsieur de Trécourt been boasting to you?"

"No; I tried to make him tell me about it, but he would n't. His father told me."

"So, that accounts for it. I lost sight of you after dinner. You were smoking with the gentlemen in the library, I presume."

Jack laughed. "I should like to go up in a flying machine. It must be great fun."

"You will do nothing of the sort," said Helen. "It's most dangerous."

Jack's laugh was scornful and incredulous.

The Princess went to Helen's room for a cigarette and a little chat before retiring.

"You enjoyed yourself this evening?"

"Immensely. Is n't grandmamma a dear!"

"Yes," assented the Princess. "We are a long way from the Villa Fontana already."

Silence.

"I wrote this morning."

"Ah! what did you write?" In default of an immediate answer Tatia asked another question. "What does she write you?"

Silence again.

"It's very difficult to write grandmamma," said Helen at length. "She speaks about the garden. She does n't ask any questions. I told her

about my shopping, and the Opéra, and what Jack was doing. It is n't easy to share happiness with grandmamma. I sometimes wonder if she knows what it is."

"Happiness, my child, like other things, grows old. You will not recognize your own when you are my age."

"You are not serious, Tatia."

"Quite. I spend my time saying to myself, 'What a silly ignoramus you were then, Tatiana!'"

Helen laughed. "At any rate, one can share happiness with you, for you give it."

"Do I?"

"You know you do."

The Princess stood up, thrusting one slippered foot out to the fire. "Well, in that case give me back a little of it. I adore happiness." Helen was silent. "Nothing in particular — just happiness in general — is that it?"

"Just happiness in general."

"But I like details better. Why are you happy, Helen?"

Curled up in her chair, Helen was looking dubiously at the Princess's back.

"Is n't it enough that grandmamma is coming —"

"Quite enough," laughed the Princess, throwing her cigarette into the fire. "Go to bed now and get your beauty sleep. You have such need of it!"

XV

DIMITRI was reading when Tatia returned to the salon. He rose as she entered, and she gave him her friendly smile for his never-failing courtesy.

She was apparently heedless of the need of any beauty sleep for herself, for although it was late she went to her desk and began to write. When she had finished she took her letter to Dimitri and laid it on the open page of his book.

"That's an excellent letter," he said, handing it back to her.

"You think so?"

"Excellent. When Coulomb reads it he will think it is you who are doing him a favor."

"Then you approve of it."

"Decidedly. It is a masterpiece. But I would not send it."

She looked at him furtively, while taking the combs from her hair.

"State your objections, please, Dimitri."

"It seems to me they are obvious, and I am positive you are well aware of them."

"You think it ill-advised on my part to make such a suggestion?"

"So far as Coulomb is concerned, no. He is an excellent fellow, an old friend. He will be charmed to do what he can to please you."

"But you have objections. Convince me, please."

"There are many. To begin with, there is the old one — that you make up your mind too quickly."

"Am I always wrong, Dimitri?"

He moved uneasily in his chair.

"Rules, Tatia dear, have their exceptions. In this case your affections are running away with you."

She was playing with the combs in her lap, twisting them this way and that as their stones caught the light.

"It takes you so long to come to the point," she sighed.

"My dear Tatia," taking one of the combs from her hand and examining it critically, "is it necessary to come to the point, as you say, when we both understand each other perfectly?"

"I am not at all sure of that."

"Oh, if you throw doubts upon — upon my intelligence — I will say that, although I did not sit opposite our young friends to-night as you did, I am not altogether blind."

"Ah, then you saw!" she said quickly.

"I certainly found it easier to engage the attention of the neighbor on my right than that of the young lady on my left. I know, too, since I know you tolerably well, that from a conversation between two giddy young persons at dinner you are

drawing conclusions which appear to me, since you insist upon it, ridiculous."

The Princess was silent.

"Everything," she said at length, musingly, "must have a beginning, and some things begin with what you call giddiness."

"I am not disputing the beginning; I am thinking of the end — the conclusions of your imagination. Nor do I blame Monsieur de Trécourt for being a bit dazzled. But, seriously, to conclude from a single meeting —"

"Two."

"Two?"

"Yes, two. When I returned the other day I saw Trécourt in the motor conversing with a young lady who, in order to rid herself of him, was obliged to give him the violets she was wearing."

"There! You see now! I warned you in Nice of the responsibility you were assuming. All the more reason for prudence. You wish to add fuel to the fire."

"Come, come, Dimitri, try to be logical. You begin by saying one meeting is too little, and now you pretend that two are too many."

"Tatia, it is impossible to argue with you."

"I have no wish to argue. I only ask what objections you have to Monsieur de Trécourt."

"Good Heavens, Tatia! I only know the young man since yesterday."

"But you know very well who he is. You have nothing against him, no objections to his family."

"None whatever."

"Well, then, if —"

"Wait a moment. You are proceeding in the wrong direction. Let us go back to the beginning. What is the use of discussing Trécourt's family? Does Helen wish to enter it? Does that question concern us? I know that you love Helen —"

"As my own child."

"That explains, but it does not justify."

"Then you forbid me to send this letter?"

"You know very well that is an ugly word which I have not uttered. I counsel you to sleep over it, to give yourself time for reflection."

Tatia had no desire to reflect. That Dimitri was right she was well aware. She had given way to an impulse. But after all, what did it matter! No harm was intended and none had been done.

"I *have* reflected, Dimitri. You know how things go at the Ministry. If a friend speaks, they listen. Otherwise one goes into the first empty pigeon-hole. It is not a question of bishops or knights or castles, but of a simple pawn. What difference does it make to Coulomb on what square he stands? Absolutely none. What I ask is a mere trifle, a nothing — to give Trécourt a crumb in Paris."

"For what purpose, Tatia?"

"O Dimitri, how terribly logical you are! Let us call it a whim — do you like that word better?"

He slipped the ivory paper-cutter between the leaves of his book and closed it resignedly.

Reaching over his shoulder, she spread the volume open again on his knee.

"There! dear bookworm, I am going. And if I promise to reflect, will you reflect also?"

Without awaiting his answer, she stooped, brushed his hair with her lips, and laughing softly to herself went into her dressing-room.

Of course Dimitri was right — for the present. She had acted hastily. Her letter could wait. Time would prove that she was right also.

XVI

EVERY table at Célestin's was occupied. People were standing, plates in hand, for lack of chairs. The room was redolent of perfume and pastry, and the lamps had been lit for effect, although the afternoon sun streamed in under the arcade.

"Is not your name Lee?"

The question was addressed to a boy engaged in the demolition of a small mountain of little cakes. He paused reluctantly in his work of destruction, partly through politeness and partly through surprise, to admit that it was.

"And is not that your sister Helen at the counter?"

Jack admitted this also.

He had been assisting Helen in the selection of her purchases for the *thé intime*, and was taking advantage of the delay incident to getting possession of them to demonstrate to his own satisfaction the wisdom of his choice.

At the mention of her name Helen turned to meet the pale-blue eyes of a dainty little woman of pink and white complexion and yellow hair very faintly suggestive of an art which struggles rather by anticipation than necessity against the ravages of years. She came directly forward with an effusiveness which caused Helen to draw back

a little, but which was proof against the ordinary barriers of reserve.

"How very fortunate! I heard you give the address. I am Mrs. Stuart, a compatriot of yours. I had a letter from my husband only this morning telling me you were here. We are at the same hotel. I was coming to congratulate you. I am on my way to Egypt, but one never gets away from Paris as soon as one expects, does one? Are you to be here long?"

"Not very," said Jack, alert, and thoughtful of Helen's reserve. "We are going to the Bois — grandma's waiting for us now."

"Oh, I did n't mean *here*," said Mrs. Stuart with a silvery laugh; "I meant Paris. So your grandmother is with you. How delightful! I met her once in that charming villa of hers near Mentone."

"I am afraid you are mistaken," Helen hastened to explain; "Jack means Madame de Chavigny."

"Oh, I understand — your mother's mother. You see I know all about you." What Mrs. Stuart did not know in the matter of people and their connections was not worth knowing. "I used to know your Uncle Hector in New York, but we have given up New York for London."

"Did you?" said Helen, relenting.

"Quite well, and a most delightful man he was. I'm sorry to use the past tense, but it's very nice

for you." Helen froze again. "You are not staying with Madame de Chavigny, then."

"No, we are with the Princess Ghica."

"Indeed! I saw the Prince's appointment to the Embassy in the papers. I shall run in at once to see you. Perhaps, as I am leaving so soon, I can manage this afternoon if you are to be at home."

"Why, yes, certainly, I think so." She was thinking of her *thé intime*, but tried to be cordial.

True to her promise, Mrs. Stuart "ran in" at five o'clock. It was a cardinal article in her creed never to miss an opportunity to enlarge her acquaintance list. If one made mistakes one could always drop people, which was much easier than taking them on.

Helen had gone out that morning with the Princess in search of something to read. At the door of the bookshop in the Rue du Rivoli Tatia had cautioned her as a measure of prudence to 'get something in English,' and she had returned with a volume which a well-informed clerk assured her was 'a very brilliant book everybody was reading.' Tatia, secure in her belief of the innocuousness of the English language, dropped her at the hotel to continue on her own business — the furnishing of the new apartment in the Avenue Montaigne — and Helen had devoted the morning to the 'brilliant book everybody was reading.'

It differed very materially from those which

adorned the shelves in the Villa Fontana, or which occupied the late evening hours when Mrs. Lee's tired eyes laid upon Helen the duty of finishing a chapter. From prevailing modern standpoints her education had been lamentably neglected. She could not have passed the entrance examinations of any of the institutions for her sex in her native land, and at the age when their graduates, clad in appropriate attire, were pronounced ready to grapple with the world, she was ignorant of the formidable vocabulary of the typical curriculum. On the other hand, she and Jack had acquired at first hand that indispensable accomplishment of language, so rare in the land of her birth, an accomplishment which had opened to her the stores of information on the Villa Fontana's bookshelves and the avenues of conversation in its polyglot society. The rigid exclusion from the former of frivolous literature had limited her range of vision, and Mrs. Lee's prudent selection of the sources from which her teachers had drawn her 'exercises' had not opened the doors of frivolity. She and Jack had explored the upper shelves of the bookcase, only to find the relics of their grandmother's pre-continental life gathering the dust beyond the reach of the housemaid. It was due to these stray relics that Jack had stood on the bridge with Horatius, sailed the wine-colored sea with Ulysses, and trembled under the counterpane as Helen read of Roderick Dhu's com-

bat with Fitz-James in the Scottish Highlands. Most of the "Household Book of Poetry" they knew by heart. Even an encyclopædia of the early seventies had been carefully ransacked for possible entertainment. None of these old-fashioned outlooks upon life had afforded the perspective of the 'brilliant book everybody was reading.' It possessed a style and facility of expression foreign to what Mrs. Lee called 'standards,' and it dealt with people 'rich in personality,' as a quotation from a critical review on the cover observed. The fluent style had held her attention in spite of the fact that she liked none of the people. It must be that such people had once existed. They all bore the stamp of reality. Reality entitled them to no hearing in either life or literature, but the brilliant style carried them in on its wave where life would have left them hopelessly stranded. So she read on, revolted at all their sinuous glidings, their matings and mis-matings, their desperate strivings for bubbles, through the merciless analysis of emotions which had dropped the last garments of privacy, solely to see where all this flutter of talk and motive would end.

Having been thus driven by sheer curiosity to the bitter end, she fled to Jack and fresh air for moral rehabilitation, enlisting him in the raid on Célestin's for something worthy of her tea. It was such a joy to be able to carry out little projects of this kind without consulting any one, to

treat Jack! Big projects she had none. Uncle Hector's money was literally a magic carpet, a fairy wand. She had risked no far flights as yet on the carpet, and the wand she handled timidly, as a fairy wand ought to be handled, not as a sceptre. It was Tatia who had insisted upon the maid. She had not thought of it, nor of the sable furs. But she accepted both, and the penny tarts she was going to Célestin's for, with equal hospitality toward a world which Uncle Hector's gold had changed from a cold unknown to an inviting friend.

At Célestin's the bitter taste came back with Mrs. Stuart. Hitherto her experience with disagreeable people had been confined to that horrid Ambassador with the thick lips and scrutinizing eyes, to dapper Monsieur Hermite and the queer visitors with Baedekers who peered over the railing at the Roman road and cried, 'My! think of it!' They had repelled or bored or amused her in turn. Mrs. Stuart made her uneasy, and while dressing for the afternoon she took refuge with the real people who were coming to tea.

There was Dimitri. She was fond of Dimitri. He was not very sociable, but he never put her on the defensive. One trusted Dimitri, just as one trusted all the inanimate things about one not to misbehave. He was never trying, like the men in the book, to bore in behind one's personality.

And Monsieur de Trécourt — how utterly ridic-

ulous he had been in planning that dinner! He had almost made her believe everything he said. Most of the people in the brilliant book were always doubtful of what the others said. There was no doubt whatever about Monsieur de Trécourt. He was a book pleasant to read, for she admitted that she liked Monsieur de Trécourt, while deploring that rash abandonment of her violets. One could pardon any one who was so naïvely sincere in his enterprise. The men in the book were all working like moles, by insidious siege approaches. She did not put this in so many words, or concede half as much as the episode of the violets had. But if the limousine had to be taken, she infinitely preferred to have it taken by storm than by stealth. It was simply impossible to say 'no' to him! — that is, it had been — in the future —

Then there was Tatia, as frivolous as any of them — but oh, so much more! so honest and true! She was sure of Tatia. It hurt her when any one called Tatia ugly. To be sure, if one stopped to think, she was — well, unusual, not plain, not common plainness, but the kind that guarantees. Tatia was certainly fond of trivial and frivolous things, in a regal sort of way, as queens wear ermine. They were not the end and all of striving. Did Tatia have any end, except to give happiness? She very much doubted it.

And Mr. Fearing — how dear he had been

about Jack! In the distant future she was intending to lean upon Jack, when he had grown up to be a man. As yet his overlordship was only a figment, and meantime she had leaned upon her grandmother, as one leans on any physical support devoid of human sympathy. Now she was free, not leaning upon any one. If ever it should happen to her to really need any one to depend upon, it would be Mr. Fearing.

She came at last to Madame de Chavigny, and the blood grew hot in sheer happiness at the remembrance of her soft curls and encircling arms.

"You were not a bit frightened, were you, grandmamma? — Peter is so very careful," said Helen, hovering over the tea-table.

"No, dear. But what changes!" Turning to the Princess, "not a chair on the Avenue!"

"You don't mean to say you have n't been up the Avenue since the chairs disappeared!" exclaimed Mrs. Stuart in astonishment. "Fancy! Why, I *have* to go up the Champs Élysées to see my friends."

"Our friends reside in different quarters, perhaps," said the old lady politely.

"Oh, no," averred Mrs. Stuart, "I have friends all over."

"You are very fortunate."

"You think so?" she smiled, with a lift of the eyebrows conveying embarrassment of riches.

"When one adds all one's own to one's husband's, it's almost more than one can manage."

Appalled by this vista into Mrs. Stuart's two worlds, Madame de Chavigny reverted to the motor.

"It certainly is a very quick way of getting about. It quite took my breath away."

"We shall have to talk that matter over with Mr. Fearing," said the Princess.

"If you succeed in making Mr. Fearing talk about anything," chimed in Mrs. Stuart, determined not to be left out of the conversation, "you have my congratulations. My husband wrote me he had fairly to dig the news out of him."

"News, what news?" enquired the Princess.

"About this dear child" — glancing affectionately at Helen. "Such things can't be kept a secret forever, can they?"

"It's rather a pity, is n't it?" said Tatia inscrutably.

"Mr. Fearing seemed to think so. He's much of a secret himself, so like a machine — machines are useful, but so uncommunicative."

The Princess laughed, with the suspicious frankness which characterized her when unduly amused.

The door opened and Monsieur de Trécourt came in. He went straight to Madame de Chavigny, kissing her on both cheeks, bowed to the Princess and Helen, and sat down beside Mrs. Stuart. No one presented him, but he entered

affably into conversation with that lady as if she, too, belonged there and such a formality was of no importance.

"Give Jean a cup of tea, dear," said Madame de Chavigny, laying a hand on Helen's arm. "He is too timid to ask for it."

On the far side of the circle about the tea-table, very discreet and quite absorbed in his companion, he did not suggest in the remotest degree her vivacious escort of the limousine.

"Why, Alexis!" cried the Princess, rising to greet with both hands a tall, thin man with a Vandyke beard who came in with Dimitri. "What a surprise! My cousin Saranow —"

"Oh, Madame de Chavigny and I are old friends," he smiled, lifting the extended hand to his lips. "We have plotted together these many years in the silence of the Rue du Bac. What magic has Tatiana discovered to induce you to cross the Seine? Ah, yes, I understand" — following her eyes to Helen — "The source of all our follies and blessings. Why, mademoiselle, will you not exert a little of your power on my cousin? I have offered her a suite in the Embassy, and she refuses."

"What I refuse you know very well, Alexis," said the Princess pointedly.

"What is it I know so well, Tatia dear?" said her cousin, removing his gloves deliberately. "Tell us."

"To surrender my liberty, or to encroach upon yours."

He nodded gravely.

Mrs. Stuart, out of touch with what seemed a family gathering, was waiting anxiously for some stray end of conversation to rescue her from oblivion. Happily, she caught sight of the brilliant book on the table.

"Have you read this charming book?" she asked, appropriating the Ambassador.

"I have tried to," said Monsieur Saranow, taking up the book and examining the title.

"Don't you read English easily? You certainly speak it well. It's really quite wonderful how you foreigners pick up languages."

Monsieur Saranow smiled. "You have hit upon what astonishes me, and I confess bores me in this book. I ask myself why Americans are so interested in the things by which they differ from us."

"Well, we *are* different. You can't help seeing that."

"Oh, no, madame. I admit that unreservedly. You are the novelty of the century."

"Are n't you interested in novelties?"

"They do little else than invent them for you here in Paris. It is one of the resources of the budget."

"I think the way he — or is it she? I've forgotten who the author is — describes the differ-

ence between foreign and American husbands, and the points of our women — good and bad, you know, is perfectly killing."

"It must be," said Monsieur Saranow reflectively, "that in your American atmosphere there is something that tends to comparisons. I have observed that even the Academician who goes to America immediately becomes concerned about himself."

"Most of us are; that's quite natural."

"With this difference, that we began here in Europe so long ago to take note of ourselves that we have become quite accustomed to ourselves and to each other."

"You mean you are perfectly self-satisfied, then," she hastened to say, conscious of scoring a point.

"I am afraid so. It is very stupid of us. We are an old race, bordering on equilibrium, that is, restfulness — you would perhaps say ennui."

"Dear me, no! Why, I came to Paris to escape ennui."

"And you succeed in the Rue de la Paix and the Boulevards?" enquired Monsieur Saranow impassively.

"That's where we are most of the time, to be sure, because most of the things we came for are there. But there are other places, the Bois and —"

"The museums," interjected the Princess, fascinated by the thin, silvery voice of her visitor.

Mrs. Stuart gave the intruder a grateful welcome. She had gotten perilously near the thin edge of her theme and was averse to conversational eddies which diverted her from the main channel.

"I was just going to say the museums, Princess. Is there anything particularly new in them? I leave them to my husband mostly — he's an artist, and more interested in dilapidated anatomies than I am. I must say I prefer all-round perfection — both arms, and faces with noses. But I really must be going." She began to fasten the furs about her neck, vaguely conscious of a chill in the atmosphere. "I don't suppose any of you people will be in Egypt this winter. I've taken a dahabiyeh and should be delighted" — Her small head under its toque turned birdlike to the Ambassador.

"Oh, Madame, we are so proud to have persuaded the Countess to cross the Seine — but Egypt!" He threw up his hands despairingly. "Egypt is such a long way from the Rue du Bac! We are dull people."

"It's only sixty hours. If you are dull at the Embassy, Monsieur Saranow, why don't you get a bright young American girl to pour tea for you?"

It was not uncommon when tea was served in Mr. Stuart's studio to 'talk over' departing visitors. It would have been mortifying to Madge to

know that with her departure she dropped out of the conversation. She regretted that departure keenly in crossing the lobby, where she found herself face to face with Fearing. There was no mistaking her pleasure as she held out her hand.

"How nice! Jim said you were here."

"He said I was coming," Fearing corrected.

"It's all the same. Why have n't you been to see me?"

"Give me time to breathe. I am just off the train."

She snuggled her muff close up under the chin, shooting over it an informing glance.

"And the first thought, of course, is the new acquisition."

"Acquisition?"

"Oh, you need n't pretend. Jim wrote me all about it. I won't keep you now, but run in to-night and *tell* me all about it. I'm alone. By the way, Jim says he sold Colombo. He said you told him to."

"Did I?"

"Good Heavens! He said you did."

"Well, he has, if I told him to."

She called back to him at the door of the lift: "Don't forget — I shall expect you."

XVII

In the movement incident to Mrs. Stuart's exit Monsieur de Trécourt went over beside Helen, pushing his empty cup on the edge of the table.

"What, another!"

"If you please, mademoiselle."

He began to speak in a most impersonal way — had she not so ordered? — passing from her drive in the Bois to the advantages of travel and other general topics with a subdued vivacity she knew was feigned. Through the murmur of conversation about her she had caught stray fragments of his talk with Mrs. Stuart, none of which bore the hall-marks of her light-hearted neighbor of the previous evening. What had she done? What had happened? Or was he simply mercurial? No one else appeared to notice what she did, and she put the thought aside.

He had rambled off into a long description of a new device for aerial photography which she did not in the least comprehend. The technical description was almost an affront. She tried to follow it as he sketched a skeleton design with cheese straws and teaspoons on the tray-cloth. She felt herself gradually growing hot with complete indifference for aerial photography and indignation at herself for the indifference. Why should n't she

be interested in anything so wonderful! Absorbed in his explanation, he was paying her no attention, while the spoons and straws were assuming a fearful complexity. She finally gave up watching them, to watch his hands — very slim hands with long, tapering fingers and pink nails — nice hands, she thought. Bending over his task, a fringe of brown hair got in the line of her vision. It did not matter. She had lost all understanding long since.

"How do you feel when you are flying, Monsieur de Trécourt?"

"When I am flying, mademoiselle?" His voice had the old thrill in it. "It cannot be described. It is too wonderful. One wishes never to come down, to stay up there forever. Then, you observe, by pressing this lever —"

Her voice dropped to a whisper. She could bear it no longer. "What is troubling you, Monsieur de Trécourt?"

"Hélène," called Madame de Chavigny, tapping on the table with her cane, "you and Jack are to take me home. What castles are you building over there?"

"I never can learn to call her Hélène," put in Jack opportunely.

"You need not try to, dear. She shall keep a name for each country."

Helen was already tying the ribbons of the heavy manteau which Mrs. Stuart had pronounced a model of the last century.

"Do you come with us, Jean?" said the old lady. "Is there room for him?"

"Plenty," said Jack. "I can sit with Peter."

"Tatia," said Dimitri when they had gone, "show Alexis your letter to Coulomb."

"Why?" she asked in surprise.

He nodded in Alexis's direction. "You told me to reflect, and I have reflected."

"I had not thought of that," she said soberly.

She went to the writing-desk, unearthing the letter from a mass of papers in her portfolio.

"What is this letter?" asked Alexis. "A letter to Coulomb? Show it to me."

He read it through carefully, twisted it over between his fingers, then read it again, the skin wrinkling over the straight grey eyebrows on the high forehead.

"I do not ask why you write this letter, cousin, — inasmuch as you do not take Monsieur Coulomb into your confidence. But it is inadmissible."

The Princess shrugged her shoulders.

"You have your sympathies. I have my scruples. You will not live with me. Very well. But you belong to my official household, and we do not meddle with the domestic affairs of France — on paper. *Talk* to Coulomb, Tatiana," he said, handing her the letter with his fine smile, "discreetly."

Tatia offered no reply. She knew that when her cousin closed a door there was no opening it. He always closed it with courtesy, and an equally flawless finality. The smile irritated her more than the refusal. Tall, gaunt, impeccably dressed, he was the modern counterpart of the mediæval knight in chain armor. She left him abruptly with Dimitri and went to her own room.

Some one was moving about in the adjoining one — Helen's. She listened intently for a moment till satisfied that it was not the maid, then threw open the door.

"You did n't go with your grandmother?"

"No, Monsieur de Trécourt did."

"Oh!" flinging herself into a chair, her perceptions on edge. "The apartment will be ready next Monday," she said, resorting to the cigarette case.

"That will be nice."

"Very. Alexis has engaged a chef for us."

"I thought ambassadors were above such things."

"Not Alexis. Next to the Ambassador the chef is the most important member of the staff."

"Is he?"

The Princess watched her through the curling smoke.

"Helen, you are beginning to miss Jack."

"I think that must be it."

"*It!* what's it?"

"You know Jack and I —" She stopped. The long vista of electric lights in the Avenue flared up as by magic, and at the same instant came another illumination. She dropped the curtain, shutting both from sight.

"That's one thing you have n't got to worry about, my dear. When Fearing takes hold of anything —"

"I am not worrying. I could not ask more for Jack."

The Princess turned the tiny watch on her wrist face upward.

"Suppose we dine upstairs to-night." ("I thought so!" she said to herself.) "I'll give the order now."

Alexis had gone when she reëntered the drawing room. She was decidedly upset. She was as nearly vexed as was possible with Dimitri for asking her to show her letter to Alexis. She was thoroughly vexed with Alexis for his reception of it, and she was still more vexed with herself for her rash promise to Trécourt.

"You are trying not to say, 'You see I was right,'" she said to Dimitri, "but you look it. I ought to have posted that letter without consulting either of you."

"That would have been another mistake, Tatia."

In the brief ensuing silence Tatia jumped a wide chasm. "I am perfectly sure she cares for him."

"And Trécourt — he also has the passion, I suppose," said Dimitri good-naturedly.

"A mole could see that."

Not expecting so corroborative a reply, Dimitri was silent.

"We are not all tortoises," she went on irritably. "You must n't judge Helen from yourself. Think of Hélène. You really know very little about women, Dimitri."

He looked at her in astonishment. Till now he certainly thought he knew Tatia.

"We both agree about Helen at least," he said pleasantly. "She's the salt of the earth."

"Yes; that's the trouble. We are going to dine here to-night."

She went to the electric bell. While listening to the dinner order, he endeavored to solve the enigma of Tatia's answer.

XVIII

FEARING stood inside the door of his room for a moment before pressing the electric button. He was annoyed at Stuart for his indiscretions, whatever they were, and he was angry with himself for giving any ground for them. Both Stuart and his wife had received him with a cordiality they had never accorded him before. He knew well enough to what this increase of importance was due. It was a species of flattery which had not yet ceased to amuse him — the accolade of wealth.

When the light came in answer to his pressure he saw his luggage had already been put in place and that the post was on the table. Conspicuous among the letters was a long, thick envelope which he recognized at once — the syndicate plan for the Argentine loan. The temptation to make it serve as an excuse for not accepting Madge's invitation came instantly, and he sat down and began a note. Halfway down the page he stopped, tore the sheet in two, and dropped it in the wicker basket beneath the desk. That would be running away simply because running away was the less disagreeable alternative.

While dressing for dinner a note came from Mrs. Stuart saying she had forgotten — friends were coming to take her to the theatre — people

she thought he knew — the names followed. Perhaps he would drop in for supper afterwards in the restaurant. He felt relieved, which annoyed him the more. Why on earth should he be averse to facing that fussy little woman! Better to put a stop to her activities while she was harmless, and have it over at once.

He found her in the crowded lounge, awaiting her friends.

"It was awfully stupid of me," she said. "I completely forgot. Luckily my maid has a memory. I'm a guest, else I should insist on carrying you off. Do sit down just a moment. I'm dying to hear the New York news. What brought you over? The Chavigny affair, I suppose."

"Do you call death an 'affair' over here?"

"Poor Chavigny!" She smiled up at him benevolently. "Who ever thought of his leaving such a lot of money! He did, did n't he?"

"I believe so," said Fearing, edging a little out of the swaying crowd.

"Do sit down; you'll be swept away if you don't. *Believe* so! Jim says you are his executor."

"I am, but I did n't know you had an interest in his estate."

"Don't be horrid. One is always interested in romances. You know I saw the Lee children in Mentone at their grandmother's when they were tots without a penny. You must concede there's

something romantic when the fabled rich uncle turns up in real life."

"I had n't thought of it in that light. Money usually goes to the next of kin."

"How prosaic you are! You know I had n't seen them since that time in Mentone — till to-day. We met by accident at Célestin's. The boy's a dear. I recognized the girl from her resemblance to her mother — but she 's not as pretty. What do you think of her?"

"I like her immensely — don't you?"

The admission was too candid and all-embracing to be enlightening.

"She's no French toy. She's got a will of her own — I could see that."

"A good thing to have." Fearing's eyes wandered off over the throng gathering for dinner, a confused medley of bare shoulders, jewels, and feathers. "Jim says you are on the way to Egypt."

"Oh, come! You can't put me off like that. Be good, now, and gratify legitimate curiosity. I want to know what you are going to do with your pretty ward."

"Bless me!" he laughed; "she's not my ward. She's of age."

"She does n't look it."

"That's another point in her favor," said Fearing, rescuing her handkerchief from under the passing feet.

"Thanks. She asked me to tea this afternoon at the Princess Ghica's. The old Countess was there — wonderfully preserved old lady — the Ambassador, and a young man who bored me to death. Then she's not going to America with her brother? I thought from what Jim said —"

Fearing drew a long sigh and stood up. "Jim has the artist's imagination. You must n't let him make it too hard for me to be polite."

Her eyes blazed. "You never were less so in your life," she flung at him, struggling with her wrath.

He laughed now in earnest. "I will make any amends you impose except inventing out of my ignorance. I am off for home two weeks from to-day. While you are basking in the Nile sun you can think of me, if you choose to think of me at all, as sitting at a desk in Broad Street envying — no, I won't say that — congratulating people who can go and do — where and what they please."

"That's precisely what you do yourself — no one more so."

"Yes, to a degree. Here come your friends."

To a degree! Indignation prevented her from finding just the right retort and the approach of her friends left her no time to search for it. He was plainly bored. The consciousness that he was fooling her completed her discomfiture. Two can play at that game, David Fearing! she thought — and forced a parting smile.

He noticed that she did not renew her invitation to supper.

He sent his card up the next morning to the Princess Ghica, and word came down that Miss Lee would be glad to see him. She was at the breakfast table when he came in.

"Tatia's not visible yet," she explained, giving him her hand. "Jack and I keep to our old habits. I am glad you are here. I wanted very much to see you."

He thought he noticed a change in her. What it was exactly he could not tell — nothing outward, like dress, certainly. Galatea was all he could think of.

"It seems such a long time since I left you at the villa gate — the last time. Did you think I was very mercenary?"

"No. You were quite within your rights. I suppose you want to know now definitely what they are."

The old directness did not escape her. It *was* what she wanted.

"Yes, I do. I want to know exactly where I stand before I take another step. You may disappear to-morrow as you did at Nice, and then I should be in despair."

"I am never beyond the reach of a cable, and I am here now to answer all your questions. Perhaps I have anticipated some of them in a memorandum I wrote out last night."

Something like mirth in her eyes made him stop. He was so dreadfully methodical!

"Won't you tell me first, please, about Uncle Hector?"

"I wish I could. I knew him so slightly that I don't understand why he should have singled me out as he did — except that people who carry burdens are always singled out for more."

She was tempted to say that she knew why. "Then it is a burden."

"It's a responsibility, certainly."

"You mean the money — not me."

"I'll try to distinguish between the two, if I can."

Her face lighted. "But I don't wish you to! You are the first and only friend I ever had — whom I can go to for advice, I mean. You don't mind giving advice, do you?"

"Not when it is taken."

"I promise to listen, and I think I shall take it. You know I have trusted you already with Jack."

She drew her chair closer, cleared a space on the table and spread the memorandum on the cloth.

"That's my New York address," he said, indicating the first line with the butter-knife.

"I want the cable address, too," she said, looking up quickly.

"I hope there'll be no occasion for that. However —" He wrote it in between line one and line two.

"I might," she said, watching him.

"Then this is the address of my Paris bankers — Murray Brothers — I shall see them to-day and have them send you a check-book. You know how to make out a check?"

"I saw you make one out once. Have you forgotten?"

"Of course, of course," he said hastily.

"I did n't know when I refused to give you that louis that we were going to transact business together."

"*I* did."

"I know you did, and you walked off with Jack as if we were never to meet again. Go on, please, I am interrupting."

"I have said here" — pointing to line three — "I should leave a deposit for your account with Murray Brothers before I go, and later on, beginning April first, and every quarter-day thereafter —"

"What do you mean by a quarter-day, Mr. Fearing?"

He looked at her to see if she was serious, and while somewhat in doubt concluded she was.

"I mean every three months, every quarter of a year, the first days of January, April, July, and October, I shall deposit your income to date with them, subject to your draft — and send you a statement in full. You understand?"

She nodded.

"There's a personal letter of introduction in that envelope to Mr. Murray. You can present it at your leisure, or, what will be better, I will take you there some day myself. Murray is a Scotch gentleman who will be glad to be of any service. You can place implicit reliance in him."

"What about the next line?" said Helen, pointing to the blank space below. "You have n't said yet what you are going to deposit on those quarter-days."

"I can't do that at present. Furthermore, all quarter-days are not alike."

"But is n't that the most important thing for me to know?"

"Undoubtedly. I can tell you approximately what your yearly income is likely to be—not more, to be on the safe side, than fifty thousand dollars."

The smile went out of her eyes. She leaned back in her chair, staring at him incredulously.

"Do you mean to say I shall have two hundred and fifty thousand francs all my own every year?"

"Yes, about that, more or less — more probably."

The tears started in her eyes. "And I had n't even that louis I wanted to give you."

"No, Jack told me he doubted whether you had one. I have a proposition to make about Jack," he added, steering away from the threatening tears; "I have a fortnight before sailing and I thought of running off somewhere with the motor.

I may not have another chance soon. If you could spare Jack, I could take him with me. We could be getting better acquainted. You can think it over."

"I don't need to."

"There's another thing that occurred to me," he went on hurriedly. "If you want to keep Peter — he's a careful driver and won't run you up a lot of bills —"

She stopped him with a gesture and went to the window.

"I will speak to Peter about it if you say so," he said to her back.

Helen turned. "I'm not used to so much kindness —" She was too self-contained to give way utterly, but the voice broke and she turned back again.

The clock with the three Horatii on the mantel ticked off the silence. The suffering was not all on one side.

"Well," he said, rising, "that's all, I think."

"No, it's not all," she cried, facing him, "it's only the beginning —"

The door opened to the Princess Ghica. "What! back again!" Her glance took in the memorandum on the table, "and talking business!"

"Yes," said Fearing, "it's all settled."

The Princess turned to Helen. She was gone.

Sprawling on the rug that evening, Jack was

studying a large motor map while Helen was taking down her hair.

"We are going to Chartres first — that's only thirty-seven kilometres — because there's a cathedral there —" his finger followed down the map — "then to Blois — that's where that old Guise was murdered — you remember that in our history, don't you?"

"Yes, Jack."

"And then —" He broke away from the map suddenly to follow the brush sliding back and down along the shining hair. "Don't you wish you were going with us!"

"It would be rather nice."

"Why don't you ask Mr. Fearing, Helen?"

"Oh, I think you will have a much better time by yourselves."

"I suppose we'd have to have a chaperon, and that would spoil it. But it would be fun to have you — you are the only girl I'd ask —" this majestically.

"Your acquaintance list is n't large enough to make that much of a compliment, Jack."

"I mean it, anyway. I hate most girls. When I grow up I'd marry you if it were legal."

Helen laughed. "I hope you won't make your offer from the floor on your stomach. That would be impolite as well as illegal."

"I would n't make it on my knees. I'd carry you off like Lochinvar."

"Jack, you are ridiculous."

"I'm always ridiculous or horrid or something like that," he retorted. "You don't want this *Temps* do you?"

Helen glanced over her shoulder. "No, dear."

Jack began feeding the *Temps* to the fire. "Hullo!" he cried, scanning the last remaining page, "listen to this: 'Monsieur Jean de Trécourt is named Attaché to the Legation at Seoul.'"

"Ah, that was the reason!"

Jack sat up. "Reason for what?"

"Nothing."

Jack yawned. "Well, I suppose I've got to go to bed. We are going to start at eight. We are going to leave the limousine for you. Mr. Fearing's hired an open car. I hope it won't rain."

He put his arms round her neck from behind and buried his face in the flowing hair.

"You smell awfully good, Helen. And I meant what I said — about marrying you."

"Please, Jack, you are pulling my hair."

He bent her head back and kissed her on the lips. "That's for calling me names," he laughed, "and" — repeating the operation — "that's for good-night."

When he had gone she picked up the mutilated sheet of the *Temps* Jack had left on the rug.

XIX

SITTING beside his godmother on the way to the Rue du Bac Jean de Trécourt was quite another person from the young man whose eloquence had once won him a place in Fearing's limousine. He had received from the Foreign Office that morning his assignment to Corea, an announcement which plunged him in despair. A few days before he would have been enchanted at the prospect of testing in person the mystery and glamour of the East. The thought of exchanging Avrincourt for Seoul would have set his heart beating and his imagination on fire. Just at present it was difficult to find more than monosyllables in answer to Madame de Chavigny's flow of spirits. He had not yet summoned the courage to inform her of the designs of the Foreign Office, and high spirits seemed singularly out of place. It was certainly trying to listen to her praises of her granddaughter, whose presence at that very moment was haunting the spot where he was sitting. For Monsieur de Trécourt was in that unreasonable frame of mind which has earned for lovers the reputation of blindness. Of all the conversation at his godmother's dinner he could remember only the severity with which it ended, and being like all lovers keenly sensitive to rebuke, was

depressed beyond even the power of the antidote in his breast pocket to relieve despondency. Applying what he conscientiously prided himself was the cold logic of reason to his affairs, he came to the conclusion that they were hopeless. Was it reasonable to suppose, simply because he had been carried away by so much loveliness, that *she* — evidently not! His past assurance was pitiful. His presumption had only amused her. All this was a dream, not even a hope. Until the axe of the Foreign Office fell that morning with such amazing celerity the interest of the Princess Ghica had given him courage. That rainbow of promise had disappeared. Had he been so simple as to imagine that the Princess had nothing but Monsieur de Trécourt to think of! However sincere she might have been, it was now too late.

Gradually, out of his despair, rose that bitter pleasure of bruising his wound, of asserting himself superior to pain by ministering to it. Clad in this armor of superiority, he had kept his appointment for tea at the Princess Ghica's. If opportunity presented he would mention to her, casually, that he was fortunate enough to be ordered to the East. He was tired of the banalités of the Boulevards. Travel had always been his great desire.

As for what he would say to mademoiselle — here his intentions became somewhat blurred. Not that he had anything to dissemble. Having

recovered possession of himself he had nothing to fear.

On the departure of Mrs. Stuart he had gone over, as the merest politeness required, to exchange a few words at the tea-table before taking his leave. Fortunately the inspiration came to him that aerial photography was an appropriate topic. At one moment, when asked what were the sensations of flight, he almost forgot that he had renounced forever leaving the solid earth for any flight whatever, and then, in the midst of his technical description, she had lowered her voice and eyes to utter those divine words —

"Oh," he groaned, "why must you choose that instant to go!"

"What are you saying?" asked his godmother. "It is quite impossible in these motors to make one's self heard."

"Yes, he is changing gears. But I think we are here."

It was his habit when in Paris to make his home with his godmother. He fared very badly that evening in the game which always followed dinner. Corea stared at him from every domino. But he said nothing. In his present state of mind it would have been impossible either to feign enthusiasm or disguise despair.

When leaving for Avrincourt in the morning, however, he said to Jacques: "Say to madame that I omitted to tell her that I am about to go to

Corea —" And Jacques bowed, smiling, having the idea that Corea was some place or person in the immediate neighborhood.

Under the archway, between the dealer in antiquities and the purveyor of delicatessen, still brooding over his unhappy destiny, Jean stopped short, his heart in his mouth. A limousine was just drawing up to the curb.

To retreat was to enter a *cul-de-sac*, to be caught on the landing before Jacques could open the door. Should he acknowledge the perfidious smile he foresaw on the face of the occupant of the limousine and assist her with polite indifference to alight, or pass bravely on with a feigned absorption in his own affairs? The dilemma did not present itself. There was no smile of any kind on the face of the person for whom Peter was opening the door. She remained obstinately seated, awaiting his coming. Nor could he affect indifference to the objective world when that person was saying: —

"Come here, please, Monsieur de Trécourt. I wish to speak with you. In what direction are you going?"

"To Avrincourt — the Lyons station," he stammered.

Peter stood at the door.

"Wait a moment, Peter. There are many trains to Avrincourt, are there not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, many."

"Then grandmamma can wait. We will go first to the Bois, Peter. You agree, monsieur?"

"Oh, mademoiselle," he murmured.

Not till they came out from the narrow street was a word spoken.

"Monsieur de Trécourt, why did you not tell me yesterday of your appointment?"

"Oh, mademoiselle," he burst forth, "can you not see that I am miserable, that I —"

"Hush! I know what you are about to say. Reproach me if you will for what I have done, but not for what I am doing."

"Reproach you! I, who from the first moment—"

"Stop, please — every word you speak is a reproach. I have done wrong — I should not have permitted" — She turned her face to the window, her lip quivering — "you seemed to me so frank, so ingenuous —"

"So boyish!" he said bitterly; "I remember."

"Is that a fault?" she said, turning to him. "I did not mean it so." The candor of her eyes shielded her. "Listen to me, please. Yesterday you hurt me — you have the power to hurt me — I confess it. Why should you not have told me that you were going to —"

O misguided youth! that he should say, "Because that was nothing to you."

"That may be true. Did you expect me to believe that it was nothing to you?"

"It seems I am an open book."

"No, Monsieur de Trécourt, you are not an open book; but last night, when I saw in the *Temps* your appointment, I also saw how thoughtless I had been —"

"And you pitied me!"

"— and I asked myself which is most loyal, to make believe that I saw nothing, to let you go away thinking ill of me, or to come to you frankly and say, forgive me — give me back my violets, Monsieur de Trécourt, and let us start anew."

"To begin anew I must stop loving you."

Above the muff on her knees lay a little hand. But he did not dream of taking it. His audacity was of another and more compelling kind.

"Can we not go back to — where you cease telling me so? It was because I thought you were *not* a boy that I dared speak to you. You ask of me — everything — shall I ask nothing of you? Not to go away hurt and despising me — not to treat me as if I were without feeling or comprehension — not to reject what I offer you — to be your friend. Is that nothing to you?"

There are those who in Monsieur de Trécourt's place would have spurned so paltry an offer — perhaps, also, would have seized the little hand on the muff and, risking all, lost all, for a moment of possession. Perhaps he realized this. Perhaps her appeal gave him courage; perhaps, as he persuaded himself, he *really* loved her, and could not so much as touch that little hand without its con-

sent; perhaps he recognized in her something infinitely sweeter and finer than a gust of passion could possess itself of; perhaps, too, in the soil of her tenderness the germ of a hope which counselled patience stirred to life.

"You know that is everything to me. I promise you."

What, he did not say, and she did not ask. Did either know? In the love of every man there is something reminiscent of childhood — obedience; as in the love of every woman there is something prophetic of motherhood — sovereignty.

After all, it was no relief. It was a truce, not peace, — at best peace of mind, masquerading as peace of heart, — and yet a closer, atoning understanding which made it possible to speak of lesser things, — converse as subdued as the winter day and the bare *allées* of the wood, lapsing into silences filled with a sense of community dearer and more perilous than speech.

At the Lyons station she dropped a crumb of comfort. "You must come and see us in the Avenue Montaigne. We move this week. I am really more interested in aerial photography than you think."

When he had gone she lowered the window behind Peter, whose head was turned for orders.

"Are n't we somewhere near the Bois de Vincennes, Peter? Do you think you could find your way there?"

Peter thought he could.

She had set out that morning with the intention of spending the day with her grandmother. Once more she decided that her grandmother could wait. She wanted to be alone a little while. She wanted to understand why it was she was not unhappy. There seemed to be good reason for being so. Notwithstanding the brave smile on Monsieur de Trécourt's face as he disappeared in the stream pouring into the station, she was sure she had caused *him* unhappiness. It was not reasonable to find pleasure in inflicting pain. Had she really inflicted any? With some misgivings, but very resolutely, she had steered her barque into troubled waters, and it had floated out upon a more peaceful, a different sea, from what she expected. Her whole effort had been to push him away. Just now, instead of inspiring distrust or even caution, he had drawn her to him. She was still firm in the belief that she had acted from the honestest of motives, straightforwardly — but wisely? The result was so different from what she had foreseen. Pressing her foot firmly against the footrest, she asked herself what it was exactly that she had foreseen. Certainly not the plain statement that he loved her. Something of that thought, to be sure, had been the reason for doing what she had done — to put her little foot on the spark before it became flame, to extinguish that spark by the loyal confession of her own thoughtlessness, and

to keep him — yes, to keep him as her friend. If love had been in the background of her thought, the word itself had not taken form there. She was astonished now that it had been spoken. How quietly and naturally it had slipped out into speech! And it could never be ignored again. She pressed the little foot against the bar, but the word was there, more compelling in memory than in speech — the undying flame whose warmth stole up to her heart and cheek.

"Peter, you may turn now — the Rue du Bac."

She stopped on the quay for flowers. It was a dull leaden day, but the flower-stalls never seemed so lovely nor her grandmother so dear.

"Hélène," said Madame de Chavigny, as she came in, "have you heard the news? Our Jean goes to Corea."

Our! her grandmother invariably spoke of him in that way. It had never suggested partnership before.

"Yes." She had not intended to mention her drive, but she hated deception. "I met him just now at the door and took him to the station."

"Then he told you."

"Yes." The necessity of saying something, anything, urged her on. "It will be a wonderful experience."

"Did he say so? Then he was pleased?"

"N-no — not very — we were speaking of other things. We are moving into the new apart-

ment this week. It is lovely. You must come and see it."

Madame de Chavigny watched the slender fingers lifting the roses one by one from their box to the vase, vainly endeavoring to see the averted face.

Helen was silent. She hated evasion, too.

XX

THE tall, spare figure of Monsieur Saranow was a familiar one to early frequenters of the Bois de Boulogne. Guardians of the peace who had learned to recognize the iron-grey horse of the Russian Ambassador stood at attention as he passed, irrespective of the weather, on his morning ride, and paused to admire the soldierly form of His Excellency after the salute had been acknowledged.

In the matter of return salutes Monsieur Saranow was not invariably so fortunate as they. On this particular winter morning he had raised his hat to a charming face in a passing limousine, to learn that preoccupation with a companion and not the speed of the motor or the winter landscape was the reason for a wasted civility.

The charming face hovered before His Excellency on the homeward ride, and smiled at him later from among official papers on the desk in the Chancellerie. His cousin, the Princess Ghica, had not infrequently mentioned that face in her exuberant epistles. Tatia was given to exuberance, and he had discounted her descriptions accordingly. In this instance he had been forced to admit that she had not exaggerated.

He had not asked the reason for her letter to

Coulomb. The most ordinary astuteness, however, could not fail to see a remote connection between that letter and the young man who found tea in Tatia's salon so diverting and the morning air of the Bois so much to his liking. While signing documents at the Chancellerie desk Monsieur Saranow became obsessed by a sense of duty — the duty of doing something or seeing somebody. When the last routine duty was finished, leaning back in his leather armchair, he set this other, as yet vague, duty on an imaginary pedestal, the better to envisage it from every angle. Scraps of forgotten information in his cousin's correspondence came to mind while thus occupied, from which he gradually evolved another image which he also set up beside that of duty — the image of a girl about twenty, living a secluded life with an old woman who fared badly under his cousin's pen, a girl upon whom a shower of gold had descended as on the mythical Danaë, and who had evidently inherited from overseas that microbe of careless indifference for old-world proprieties which was his present concern.

In the antiquity shop of the Rue du Bac there existed a console on which his collector's eye had long been fixed. It was a signed piece, with admirable bronzes, worthy of a museum. But the price was quite too high. Should he pay that old rascal who had special prices for ambassadors another visit, and incidentally take advantage

of his proximity to Madame de Chavigny's doorway to pay her one also? The old Countess was a delightful *causeuse*. Over a biscuit and a glass of sherry — no, he would not trouble that dear old lady or disturb the joy of her new possession.

There was that hot-headed godson of hers, and there was Tatia. He dismissed them both. Monsieur de Trécourt was an *exalté* who might not be amenable to discipline, and Tatia was such a blunderer!

The face of duty on its pedestal softened, and the charming face in the limousine appeared in the mirror of the polished mahogany desk. It was a disagreeable and thankless rôle, that of busybody. After all, was it any business of his? He would wait.

He waited till his cousin was established in the new apartment of the Avenue Montaigne, where he decided to go at the tea-hour to inspect its furnishings, about which he foresaw he would have much to criticise. Not that Tatia's taste would be at fault. That was the difficulty. Tatia never maintained a proper balance between her tastes and her resources, and Dimitri was too indulgent, or lazy — both!

He arrived a little early, before Tatia was receiving. Except in respect to royal or strictly official appointments, Tatia was irregular. He had not counted upon this deliberately. It merely happened that he advanced the clock as she retarded

it. In this way he gained nearly a half-hour. It happened also that Mademoiselle received him. This he might have foreseen, for she struck him as a rather prompt and energetic person. At all events, it was a piece of good fortune.

Looking over his cup at the young lady presiding at the tea-table with so naïve a composure, the parting recommendation of Mrs. Stuart occurred to him. He also said to himself that it would be a pleasure to match his wits against hers. But this would be to declare himself an antagonist, a part he was not intending to play and which might end in disaster. For he had observed that with human beings, as with horses, delicate nostrils like those the other side of the samovar went usually with a dangerously spirited disposition.

Was mademoiselle enjoying Paris? Immensely. Did mademoiselle, whose French was so perfect, perchance speak Russian? A little, a few words caught from Tatia.

To be sure, but, he was bound to say, a poor teacher who spoke her own language badly — otherwise an excellent person with an abnormally developed heart, an organ more unruly than the tongue.

Mademoiselle's cup paused on the way to the lips.

Monsieur Saranow was a past-master of indirection. Looking at that moment into the clear eyes

which held his own, he decided that indirection would be a blunder.

"Mademoiselle," he said in his confidential manner, "will you permit me to commit an indiscretion?"

"An indiscretion, Monsieur Saranow!"

The words had no sooner escaped him than he began to regret them. But the issue was joined.

"Recently, while taking my morning exercise in the Bois —"

The small mouth tightened, then broke into a smile. "I know what you are going to say; you are going to accuse me of one."

There was no trace of resentment in the voice. The confusion he anticipated he was experiencing himself.

"My dear child," he said, laying his hand on hers, "have I accused you of anything! I was only thinking that in a great city like this one, a sort of cave of Dionysius, repeating every whisper —"

"Monsieur Saranow, you need not defend yourself. I absolve you beforehand. You are quite right. I admit the indiscretion. In your turn I ask you to admit that the reason for committing it was right also."

"I am convinced of it." The frankness disarmed him. "But," he persisted, for Duty stood at his elbow, "in the exercise of rights a certain perspective is necessary. No single right, for ex-

ample, stands by itself, being always so involved with other rights that, to risk a paradox, what is in itself absolutely right becomes at times relatively wrong."

He looked up, smiling confidently.

"I admit that also, and now that we have acknowledged our indiscretions and pardoned each other —"

"Oh, mademoiselle," he cried, throwing up his hands, "I have made a mess of it!"

The smile deepened. "Did you expect me to be angry? You see I am not. Ought I to be?"

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed. "Do not visit such a penalty upon one who has yielded to the detestable habit of giving advice."

"You confess, then, that I do not take it so badly."

His shrewd eyes twinkled as he set down his cup. "I am not sure whether it is you or I who is giving it — a little more hot water this time, please, — a cup of real Russian tea —"

"Such as Tatia makes — I know." And they both laughed together.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he said, shaking his long forefinger, "some day, when we are better acquainted, I shall give you advice of another kind."

"Of what kind, Monsieur Saranow?"

"Not to treat too lightly the advances of one who desires the privileges of friendship."

"I give you those privileges now, with this cup of tea. Has it the right color?"

The door opened at last. Never before had Monsieur Saranow been so glad to see his Cousin Tatia.

"Letters from Jack, dear," she said to Helen, with a nod for Alexis. "What do you think of it, cousin?"

She swept the room with a critical eye.

"Excellent, excellent — as if you had lived here a century — also, as if you intended to."

"Come and see." She led the way into the large salon. "We are going to give a dinner on the twentieth. Will you honor us?"

"The honor is mine. Who are your guests?"

"Thank you for answering before asking. Quite large enough for a dance, is n't it." She stood under the crystal lustre, surveying the room approvingly. "The music-room is there, the dining-room beyond, and on this side, —" drawing the portières, — "Dimitri's den."

"Excellent, excellent," he repeated. "And your guests, Tatia."

"Here they are —" fumbling among the papers on Dimitri's desk — "see for yourself."

"It seems this den of Dimitri's is yours also."

"Naturally."

"I see here the name of Coulomb," he said, scanning the list in his hand. "You are not writing any more letters?"

She flashed him a look of indignation.

"But you have seen him."

"Yes, he has been here."

"I am not speaking of your eyes, my dear cousin, but of your tongue."

"Not a word," she replied shortly.

"So then you have abandoned Monsieur de Trécourt. Does it please you to enlighten me on the subject of your interest in that gentleman, and to tell me why he has fallen from grace?"

"You have not guessed?"

"It is less fatiguing to ask."

The Princess winced. Her usually confident state of mind was perturbed. Trécourt's Corean assignment had been a disagreeable surprise, and of her cousin she stood as nearly in awe as was possible for her in respect to any one.

"Since it is settled it does n't matter," she said evasively.

"Ah, well, if it is settled, let us say no more about it."

"Sit down, Alexis," pushing a chair toward him and sinking into one herself; "I want to talk to you. What do you think of her?"

"Of whom?"

"Helen."

"Of mademoiselle? How you jump about! Charming."

"Is n't she." She paused to light her cigarette.

He was looking curiously at her over the tips

of his fingers, joined end to end. "Go on, Tatia. I am listening."

"You know very well why I am interested in Trécourt. The thought occurred to me the other night at Madame de Chavigny's dinner. She was sounding the praises of her godson the entire evening. I am confident it was her thought also. Besides, he pleased me. Was it a bad one? Helen is twenty. On his side there is nothing to find fault with. It was easy to see, too, that they pleased each other. So, in a moment of" — she made a gesture signifying further explanation was unnecessary — "I spoke to Trécourt" — the gesture was repeated with greater emphasis — "Oh, guardedly — not in so many words — only that I might, perhaps — well — you saw from my letter — intercede for him."

"Having conceived this excellent idea, why do you abandon it?"

"It is not for you to ask me that question, Alexis, — you who forbade me —"

"Only to put your ideas on paper."

"But before I had the opportunity to speak he is bundled off to Corea."

Alexis smiled. "You do not mean to tell me, Tatia, that so simple an obstacle as a ministerial decree discouraged you!" Serious herself, his bantering tone exasperated her. Or was he, perchance, serious? "Women are so unreasonable," he mused; "they wish to keep their children in

leading-strings — to marry them off like blind kittens whose eyes are not yet open to the world in which they are to live."

She endured the ensuing silence till she could bear it no longer.

"Why do you look at me in that way, Alexis?"

"I was thinking," he said slowly, "that I have half a mind to confide to you an encounter which I have just had with our young friend."

"Just now, with Helen!" she cried, alert at once. She checked herself. It was never of any use to hurry him. "You rarely confide anything to me."

"You would have laughed, Tatia."

"Come, come, Alexis" — losing patience — "I am laughing already."

"I undertook to offer her a little advice, a word of caution — a mere word — after meeting our young lovers one morning in the Bois." Tatia's eyes were opening wide. "Youth is so imprudent. I even thought of consulting you, Tatia."

"Even!"

"But in so delicate a matter —"

"Delicate! Everybody knows with what delicacy you convey your opinions!"

"I did my best. I wrapped them up carefully in a Greek legend, reminding her that the cave of Dionysius is not altogether a fable. I was prepared for all contingencies, indignation, confusion, penitence —"

The Princess laughed her laugh of pure enjoyment. "You don't mean to say you offered to pardon her!"

"Quite the contrary. She convinced me that it was I who was in the wrong. Naturally it was I who was pardoned. She is a very clever young lady."

Tatia blazed up at once. "Clever is not the word for Helen. She is too honest."

"If by honest you mean communicative — at all events, we parted good friends. But are we not leaving her a long time alone with the samovar?"

"She has her letters," replied Tatia, rising.

In the passage from Dimitri's den to the salon she did some rapid thinking. Too honest, yes, and too fearless! That Helen should run off every afternoon to the Rue du Bac was natural enough. No one could dispute the prerogatives of Madame de Chavigny. But with Trécourt, alone, in the Bois! Her habit, now that Jack was not here to accompany her, of rushing about Paris in the motor with truly American *insouciance* had already aroused serious misgivings. Tatia disapproved of it thoroughly, though she had not yet ventured to interfere. To Helen's independence of character there had been added that other independence conferred by money. Insensibly she had grown to feel that the Helen of to-day was neither so approachable nor so amenable to dis-

cipline as the penniless dependent of the Villa Fontana. But, after all, she, Tatia, was to a very real degree responsible for her. Disapprobation notwithstanding, she could but smile — for her intuitions were right! How she would laugh at Dimitri! But how perfectly ridiculous to set out for Corea! What were these children thinking of? To sacrifice the present for a career? With a million in the pocket? What a nightmare!

"Children always take the future for granted," she said, thinking aloud, "as if happiness were a right. At our age, Alexis, we thank God for every crumb from his table."

"You manage to pick up a good many crumbs, Tatia. Will you accept one from me? Go with me to Petersburg this summer?"

They were at the door of the salon. She stopped, looking at him incredulously.

"And leave Dimitri? No, thanks."

"I am sorry. I must leave Dimitri in charge." He took up his hat and gloves. "Au revoir, mademoiselle. I shall not forget that friendship implies obligations as well as privileges." To Helen's smile he nodded enigmatically. At the door he turned to his cousin: —

"Think it over, Tatia. One can pay too dearly even for Dimitri."

XXI

JEAN DE TRÉCOURT'S personality was one that appealed to women, a compound of shyness and daring — shyness without fear and daring without coarseness. Gifted with a lively imagination, the only avenue to the heart, it was this quality which made him most at ease in the society of the other sex. No one could accuse him of being a ladies' man in the sense of absorption in, or even liking for, the accomplishments which distinguish that monstrosity — as repugnant as the Hermaphrodite of the Greek sculptor. But his manhood lacked the salt of self-conceit, the aggressive self-confidence of pure masculinity. Quiet, thoughtful, modest among his fellows, he often suffered misconception from men in the smoking-room after dinner, where assertiveness contends with merit — the merit that waits the test of emergency before disclosing itself. Elsewhere he won his way by the sure, unconscious instinct of feeling, the dominant trait of all winning personalities, by the warring qualities of submissiveness and impetuosity which take the heart by storm when bolder measures leave it cold.

He was therefore his mother's child rather than his father's. The latter, imperious, wise in his own conceit, with the perversity which seeks to

re-mould what it does not understand, had begun in infancy the futile task of refashioning nature, to trace the grooves in which this nature was to run. Thus far Jean had not revolted. Once he would have welcomed the freedom from paternal domination offered by his Eastern assignment, as he had welcomed its temporary eclipse during the term of his military service. Just now a new factor of control converted every spot but Paris into the uttermost waste parts of the earth. Just now he was struggling with those counter-currents of fealty and desire which engender the 'torments of love.'

He knew well what reception his father would give to the news of his assignment. He would remind him that his own diplomatic career had begun in Teheran, and dilate on the opportunities afforded by a distant post, removed from the intrigues of home politics, for laying the foundations for a distinguished future. He would forget the years he had languished, forgotten, in that distant post. All the musty wisdom of the old diplomat in retirement would be his to profit by. His mother would shed some tears, and dry them busying herself over his outfit.

For all this he was prepared when returning to Avrincourt on the day of his interview with Helen. His father's notion of life was too simple to be mistaken. Its first and last term was obedience. Discussion was out of the question. The

only alternative was flat rebellion. Listening to the complacent congratulations which greeted him, there came the vision of a small hand lying on a muff. Ah, if that little hand were in his, he would defy the world! Was he responsible for the thoughts which bubbled up from the twin springs of misery and hope?

Fealty was uppermost when he presented himself in the Avenue Montaigne on the evening of the Princess's dinner; but a fealty disposed to search, furtively, in the company of hope, for avenues of escape, and which had to be held well in leash.

It was not without some hesitation that the Princess had added his name to her dinner list. There were times when Helen's demeanor almost made her believe she was mistaken. Once she had been on the verge of opening her heart in a burst of confidence. But opening her heart to Helen was really opening Helen's. She could not honestly say that Helen's manner was less affectionate. She had always been frank, though not always transparent or demonstrative. Sometimes Tatia debated whether the change, if change there was, was not the fiction of her own sensitive affection. With all her tendency to plain speaking, she had the gift of comprehension, of comprehending that in Helen's equal but less impulsive frankness there were doors which only Helen could open, which it would be sheer madness to force under any pretence of affection or interest.

Discussing her dinner list one evening with Dimitri, she appealed casually to Helen. There was Monsieur de Trécourt, who she understood was soon to leave Paris — should she include him? Helen's acquiescence was so completely indifferent as to be disconcerting. Indifference was a cloak which might conceal anything. She looked over at the girl, absorbed in her book, — and Jean's name went on the list. Whatever else Tatia was, she was not the burnt child which dreads the fire.

The exactions of precedence admitting of no elasticity in her seating arrangements, her choice for Helen lay between the two ends of the table, beside either the third secretary of the embassy or Monsieur de Trécourt. Consulted as to her preferences, Helen said it did not matter.

"But I want you to have an agreeable companion, dear."

"I shall in either case."

"Toss up for it," suggested Dimitri.

"Very well," laughed Helen.

"Monsieur de Trécourt," she said, when he offered his arm, "it was literally fate which destined you to take me to dinner again."

Before she could explain her meaning, "I thought it was you," he whispered.

Once more she regretted her words, and once more she laid the blame upon him.

"You are incorrigible — you deserve a reprimand." The reprimand was less severe than the one she sought for. "I asked you to come to finish your explanation of that device for aerial photography. Have you forgotten?"

"No, mademoiselle, I have not forgotten, but I beg of you to remember that in disobeying one command I was obeying another."

"Do you think obedience consists in reminding me of it?" she said coldly.

One topic they sedulously evaded — Corea; each giving the other the credit for avoiding what neither dared to mention. But the truce was broken by Jean's vivacious neighbor, who, before the napkins were unfolded, exclaimed: —

"So you are going to the Hermit Kingdom, Monsieur de Trécourt. What luck!"

"Why do you say luck, madame?" asked Jean, endeavoring to smile.

"Because you will have such interesting things to tell us when you return. If there were a Madame de Trécourt" — she shrugged her pretty bare shoulders — "I would perhaps not say so, for I confess there are regions more attractive to me. But for a young man without encumbrances — surely there must be adventures there — lions, perhaps. Are there lions in Corea?"

"You turn me over very lightly to the wild beasts, madame."

He was thinking meantime that if there were

to be adventures in Corea it might not be necessary to await his return to relate them. Then, at the first opportunity, when the rising hum of voices permitted, he ventured: —

"May I write to you, mademoiselle — of the Corean lions?"

But the answer, if any, was caught in the currents of conversation and swept away.

Thereafter the dinner dragged on for him through its many courses, the personal note lost in the general talk, till the ladies were escorted back to the drawing-room and Dimitri's den swallowed up the men.

Jean lingered. "You have not answered my question, mademoiselle," he said, standing before her.

She looked up from her seat with that little quiver of the mouth he loved.

"Can you not wait till I have first written you?" The light which flamed up in his eyes transfigured him. "Please go, Monsieur de Trécourt. Why do you make me say things which I regret — I hate you!"

The words came with the dazing force of a blow. For a moment they conveyed no meaning. Then the blood rushed back to his face and he turned stiffly on his heel.

Subsequently in the smoking-room, he made some desperate but futile efforts to escape. The great Coulomb deigned to converse with him for

a flattering period. His Excellency Monsieur Saranow even promised him letters which would prove useful, for events were thickening in the Orient. When at last he managed to slip away, Tatia lay in wait for him.

"What a villainous luck you have, Monsieur de Trécourt! Let us hope it will not be for long."

He was at that moment near to despising all women for their deceit. Groping about in his bitterness for an answer worthy of such flippancy, he hit upon one of her own.

"I remember, Princess, that you once told me there were ladders which one must climb alone. Profiting by your kind permission I ventured to address mademoiselle on the subject — and the incident is closed."

His heels clicked together, and before she could recover from her astonishment he had disappeared.

The relief he experienced in making this unpremeditated disclosure was instantaneous. He had accepted the fact, the incident, he repeated to himself, was closed — and the wound. He had violated his promise, she had reminded him of it brutally, and all was over. It was only because he had hitherto refused to admit it that he had suffered.

It was this convincing logic which enabled him a moment later to search phlegmatically for a

modest cab among the limousines in the Avenue Montaigne.

"I noticed in the Gazette that you are sending our young friend Trécourt to Corea."

It was Alexis speaking to Coulomb. The deference accorded to greatness had left the two tête-à-tête on the deep divan of the smoking-room.

"Trécourt — Trécourt," repeated the Minister, knitting his eyebrows in an effort of memory; "ah, yes, Corea, to be sure. He told me just now he was leaving to-morrow. *Mon Dieu*," he added, leaning forward to deposit the ash of his cigar in the lacquered tray, his eyes twinkling, "one must send him somewhere."

"It happens," pursued Alexis, "that I have some despatches for our diplomatic agent in Egypt — too important for the mail. Just now we are short-handed at the Embassy. Would it embarrass you if Trécourt remained over a day in Cairo to deliver them? He goes by Suez, I presume?"

"By no means, my dear colleague, by no means. Send them to me. I will make a note of it —" taking out his tablets — "and now, shall we join the ladies?"

Meanwhile Tatia's thoughts were continually slipping away from the formalities of after-dinner conversation. She was thankful when the last guest had departed. The first bewilderment pro-

duced by Jean's abrupt announcement had been succeeded by a deep concern. She was not distinguished for her ultra-conventional methods. In yielding to her impulse to achieve for Helen a happiness supreme in her own heart, she had counted upon piloting the ship of Helen's destiny with her own experienced hands. Helen had never had any secrets she had not shared. In the sincerity and affection of her motives she had forgotten that she had one which she had not shared with Helen. The thought that there should grow up between them any detachment of interest dismayed her.

She was not in the habit of weighing her words with any one, never with Helen — at least not till recently. The mere thought of doing so would have given them a significance foreign to her impulsive utterances, outbursts which always vanished like a puff of steam. But when sitting before the fire that evening in Helen's room, timidity, near neighbor to embarrassment, paralyzed her. It would have been better to trust to the inspiration of feeling, instead of which she began to choose her words. She was choosing them, stamping each one with the seal of thoughtful approval, while looking at Helen, reflected in the mirror over the fireplace. She had consulted Dimitri over Helen's use of the motor. He had not seemed much impressed by her concern and had counselled caution. Just now this grievance was not

troubling her, but she might make it a stepping-stone. The slender figure in the mirror in night-dress and plaited hair was such a frail one that she longed to gather it up in her arms — which would have been infinitely best.

It was the auspicious moment for just that, for Helen, too, was in need. She had not meant to be kind to Monsieur de Trécourt. She had not meant to be unkind to him. She had meant to be neither, to hold an even course, as one is prone to do when the mind wars with the heart. And she had been both kind and unkind. She had made him flush with happiness, and she had made him miserable with disappointment. She had been untrue to herself and she was herself miserably unhappy. She knew now why. She knew when he bent over her hand without lifting his eyes and went away in silence. She knew now when she met her own revealing eyes in the mirror of the toilet-table. One moment more and she had risen to do what the Princess was longing to do herself. Unfortunately Tatia spoke first, forgetting her stepping-stone, putting her finger on the sorest spot of the heart — and the melting mood changed to ice.

"Helen, I understand Monsieur de Trécourt—"

The supple figure before the glass became instantly rigid.

"— leaves to-morrow for Corea — did he tell you?"

"Monsieur de Trécourt does n't confide his plans to me."

The Princess lost her bearings. It was rather late to confide her own plans, and the carefully chosen words slipped out of hand.

"I hoped you might —"

She got no further. The cynical laugh cut her sentence in two like a knife.

"Please Tatia" — she turned out the light above the dressing-table as she spoke — "I am not interested in Corea, and I 'm mortally sleepy."

The Princess stared at her, speechless. The words were both a shock and a revelation. She loves him after all, she thought, and sprang to her feet. There was no response in the averted face, and instantly the wall between them rose mountains high. She made a desperate effort to surmount it, but the eyes would not meet hers and the lips barely touched her cheek.

"Good-night, Tatia."

"Good-night," she murmured, bewildered and sore of heart.

XXII

THE express for Marseilles stood waiting in the Lyons station for the last signal.

Venders of sandwiches and pillows were hurrying from window to window. Porters, bent with luggage and followed by anxious travellers searching for empty compartments, elbowed their way through the struggling crowd. Without, rain was falling in torrents. Its roar on the glass roof overhead sounded incessant above the shrill cries of men and women, over whom the wind swept the swirling clouds of pungent smoke from the engine panting rhythmically outside the great iron arch. As the hands of the big clock suspended above the platform neared the hour, the station-master in his red and gold cap lifted his hand, doors were banged to the cry of "*En voiture, messieurs!*" and hands waved farewells from the windows.

Jean's foot was on the step when a slender figure wrapped in a crimson cloak forced its way through the throng about him. Helen! Helen! She was in his arms — "Oh, my Helen!"

Just for a moment, a moment to be remembered through eternity, he held her, lips to lips, in the smoke and wind, deaf to the world. "Quick — go — you will be left — Oh, quick, quick!" she gasped, struggling free. A rough voice in his ear

cried, "*Voyons! voyons! montez donc!*" a vigorous hand pushed him up the step, the door clanged, and the platform, with its sea of upturned faces under the flickering lights, slid slowly backward.

At the window, the moisture of her lips still on his, the freshness of her cheek wet with the rain still against his, staring into the night which like a tunnel engulfed him, he heard a thin, high voice saying pleasantly: —

"If monsieur does not object we will close the window. The night air is unhealthy."

A little old man in the remote corner of the compartment, fumbling in his portmanteau and smiling at the follies of youth, was putting on his skull-cap.

XXIII

FOR Madame de Chavigny life centred in the person of Helen. It was not in her nature to be actually jealous of the Princess Ghica's possession, yet she was not wholly reconciled to the winter's distribution of it. To the Princess it seemed that when Helen was not ransacking Paris for Jack's outfit she was sure to be found in the Rue du Bac. To Madame de Chavigny these visits seemed few and far between. It was always a sacrifice to surrender her treasure in favor of engagements made in the Avenue Montaigne, or on the appearance of Jacques to say that mademoiselle's car had returned for her and the plea that Peter could not be kept waiting indefinitely. It was a delicate matter to risk offending the Princess, whose claims of affection were too sincere to be undervalued. Nevertheless her own claims were paramount, and all others perilously near intrusions. She had not discussed the future with Helen, but with the coming of springtime and its annual flight into the country she counted upon entering into fuller possession of her rights. At first the contrast between the seclusion of the Rue du Bac and the life of the Avenue Montaigne had affrighted her, as if the all she had to offer, the love

of an old woman, were not enough to set against the seductions of the great outside world. Little by little this fear had passed, and the tacit understanding that they belonged to each other became firmly established. To the claims of the Villa Fontana neither ever referred.

Every afternoon, when dipping her biscuit in the sherry, she heard Jacques, an enormous box of flowers in his arms, say proudly, "for Madame la Comtesse from mademoiselle"— a formula repeated the twentieth time with as much unction as the first.

It was Helen, fresh as a flower herself, who brought them to-day, walking in with maid and portmanteau and the astounding and enchanting announcement of her intention to remain overnight. It was her first visit of that length, and a rare excitement pervaded the household; for the bedroom overlooking the court was to be prepared and additions made to the day's menu suitable for a young lady whose wealth, according to Jacques's estimate, attained fabulous proportions.

Without, the day bore no resemblance to the joyous one within. On the flagging of the court the pools of gathering water, lashed by the furious rain, danced in the glare of the lights, lit long before their time. But rain or shine, there was a dress, ordered for the Embassy ball, to receive a last verdict at six o'clock. In vain Madame de Chavigny protested that to-morrow would do as

well. No, Peter was coming at half-past five. What did a little rain matter!

There was another thing to be done, rain or shine. Something which at daybreak loomed only vague and shadowy in the background of the heart, like the phantom shapes of the pedestrians seen through the obscuring mist when the shutters were first parted in the Avenue Montaigne — a trivial thing, just the desire to clear away a misunderstanding, to set herself right, to heal a self-inflicted wound — trivial, yet difficult of performance, but oh! so necessary and right!

The thought that Monsieur de Trécourt, on this the day of his departure, might look in upon the Rue du Bac had come even before the shutters were drawn. It was this thought that led to the note that went up on Tatia's breakfast tray, to be interpreted as the sequel to the night before.

But if Monsieur de Trécourt should not go to the Rue du Bac!

The vague desire became a hunger then, almost a purpose; and on the way through the city — it was only a little détour — the car stopped in the Rue Vignon where Peter brought back the message that the express connecting with the Messageries Steamer for the East left at seven. What should be the token of good-will and Godspeed, the messenger to clear misunderstanding away, the balm to heal the wound? One there was, mes-

senger and balm in one, not to be bought in shops or sent by other hands. She saw it reflected in the silver salver when she poured the sherry for grandmamma, listening to the story of that madcap godson's visit of farewell that very morning. May God go with him! It spoke to her in the quiet room overlooking the court when she fastened a borrowed few of grandmamma's violets just inside the fur of her cloak. She saw it again, face to face and more imperative, in the long pier-glass when the genius who presided over skirts, on her knees, her mouth full of pins, evened the train of her creation and pronounced it perfect — so imperative that when Peter, waiting for the order 'home,' heard instead 'Gare de Lyon,' indecision had vanished; and Peter, obedient and safe driver, closed the door upon a heap of passion-driven humanity, huddled in the dark corner of the car.

Passion-driven, but very resolute and calm, intent on squaring justice with mercy, till in the smoke and wind, the roar of voices and steam, struggling through the crowd under the clock which would not wait, arms caught her, the currents of passion met, and swept her away.

Where? Just now, speeding homeward, it did not matter. It was easier to look backward, over the wonderful way she had come, from that first ridiculous encounter on the landing at the head of the stairs to the present overpowering joy of

surrender and possession. Why had she struggled? — when a single instant of confession sufficed to redeem and justify everything! It was as if all conflicting emotions had suddenly arranged themselves in a preordained harmony, from which trouble of heart and confusion of purpose, regret and self-condemnation had gone forever.

The evening was warm and sultry. The fury of the storm had spent itself, stars were beginning to show through the low drift of cloud, and before the glare of windows blurred by the moisture, under the dripping trees and awnings, the hurrying stream of life flowed on unceasing. She lowered the shade at her side, shutting out this world which had no part in hers, holding fast to that moment which had thrust her, almost brutally, like a thing without will, into her new world, leaning back with closed eyes, not yet able to reconcile the loss of self-possession with the joy of surrender. Far away, somewhere beyond the curtained window was the world of shadows, — Madame de Chavigny, Tatia, Jack, an hour ago so vital in their reality and importance, now to be re-grouped, readjusted, and subordinated to a new and supreme necessity. An hour ago they had been sufficient — now she was not even sufficient unto herself. For she was no longer alone, would never be alone again. The thought surged up with all its overpowering content of mysterious meaning, obliterating everything.

As the motor turned into the Rue du Bac she sat up. Here began the world to be reckoned with. How was *he* facing it! What was he thinking, doing! A quick revulsion of loneliness, of helplessness, came over her, the fear of his impulsive boyishness, the longing to consult him, the old challenge of 'what ought to be done,' with which Jack's thoughtlessness had so often confronted her. What was to be done she knew well, and she did not recoil from it. For the first time in her life she had something to conceal, something hidden in her heart which could live only in the sun. *That* she was ready to proclaim to the whole world — but to explain, to share with any one, even her grandmother, that one moment of abandonment in which she was still living — oh, if he were only here to speak for her!

Peter, deferential but observant, dropped his eyes to the running-board as he opened the door. This was not Peter's way, and a hot flush rose to her cheek.

There were voices in the drawing-room, and in answer to the enquiry in her eyes she heard Jacques saying: —

"His Excellency Monsieur Saranow, mademoiselle."

On that dismal afternoon Monsieur Saranow had conceived the happy idea that depressing weather sometimes had a depressing effect on prices. He would make that stubborn old man in

the Rue du Bac a final offer. He ordered his carriage, but left it at the Quai in order to divest himself of all superfluous importance, walking up the street under his dripping umbrella and making his offer with the nonchalance and indifference of the casual visitor. A moment later he was climbing the stairs to Madame de Chavigny's apartment. The coveted masterpiece of Boulle was his. Not to share his satisfaction with some one was impossible. He found Madame de Chavigny disappointingly unsympathetic. She was in despair over the prolonged absence of her granddaughter who, two hours before, had gone for a fitting — and without her maid! Something certainly had happened. He was offering to send his own carriage when the bell tinkled in the antechamber and Helen stood in the doorway.

"My child, how you have frightened me!" exclaimed Madame de Chavigny, stretching out her hands.

Coming quickly forward, Helen took them in hers and bent to the upturned face. She made no attempt to explain. Only one explanation was possible. She was grateful for delay, for Monsieur Saranow's presence. Disengaging herself from the arms about her neck, she caught his grey-blue eyes fixed upon her. He thought her at that moment extraordinarily handsome. A dressmaker who could bungle over such a figure for two hours should be summarily dismissed! She read

his frank admiration in his eyes and held out her hand.

"Have I kept dinner waiting? Forgive me."

Monsieur Saranow reached for his hat and gloves. "That would be a pleasure, but —"

"Wait a moment, both of you," interrupted Madame de Chavigny. "Helen, Monsieur Saranow has been telling me about our Jean —"

Helen started. "About —" the name with its new sense of intimacy died upon her lips — "about Monsieur de Trécourt! What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened, mademoiselle," said Monsieur Saranow, smiling. "I was only telling Madame de Chavigny that our friend Coulomb has been good enough to lend him to me. Is he not to be trusted?"

"What a villainous question!" protested Madame de Chavigny.

"I asked mademoiselle," said Monsieur Saranow. He was still smiling, but to Helen something dry and hostile in his tone jarred with the smile. He seemed to be saying: 'You have been committing another indiscretion, and this time it is more serious.'

She faced the smile bravely. "You should have asked that before borrowing him. Will you excuse me, please, grandmamma — my cloak is dripping."

What did he mean by borrowing Jean? Why

should he not trust him? Madame de Chavigny explained at dinner that Jean had been entrusted with despatches for Monsieur Saranow's colleague in Cairo, despatches of much importance, since they were not confided to the post. It was an excellent thing for him. He would have two weeks in Egypt between steamers.

Helen listened in silence. She was eating nothing. Dissimulation was a hard master. She was evidently tired. Nothing was so fatiguing as being fitted. Her grandmother urged her to retire early. As for herself she would amuse herself with solitaire that evening instead of dominos — thankful that nothing had happened!

As the Marseilles express, free from the cautioning lights of interlacing tracks, was gathering speed for its night journey, Fearing's motor, the rain dripping from its hood, crept under the *porte-cochère* of the Imperial.

Jack, impatient, was at the telephone before the luggage was brought in.

"Hullo — is that you, Aunt Tatia — yes, this is Jack — We've just got back — yes, the Imperial — how it rained — how's Helen — not there — Oh, at grandma's, is she — hope you're not tired of her — yes, we've had a splendid time — Mr. Fearing — Oh, he's all right — yes, to-morrow — good-night."

He turned an eager face to Fearing. "Would it

be too rough on Felix" — Felix was the chauffeur — "to take me over? She's at grandma's — just for a minute?"

"No, certainly not," laughed Fearing; "don't waste that minute." And Jack disappeared in the whirlwind of the revolving door.

Presently came back Felix, bringing a note from Helen. She was going to keep Jack for the night. It was a very brief little note, evidently written in haste, ending in the short, pathetic sentence: "You know there are only a few days left."

Only a few days! Jack's passionate devotion was real enough, but masculine. His dawning world held other emotions. 'It means a lot more to her than to him,' thought Fearing, his mind wandering forward into the future. Beyond placing Jack in one of the best schools in the country, he had not given much thought to the future. He owned a ranch in the West where Jack could learn to ride while waiting for the autumn term, for it might be difficult to place him in mid-winter. The manager was a careful man, with whom Jack would be quite safe and happy. He would try and get out himself for a week in the summer dulness. All this had seemed a very simple matter in Nice, and the Princess had taken charge of Helen. He was glad she got along so well with her grandmother. Notwithstanding all these satisfactory details, his ordered life appeared to be getting, in

some not clearly understood way, more and more complicated.

He did not tear up the note with his other discarded letters.

Jack found Helen in her room over the courtyard. Grandmamma explained how extremely wearing fittings were and that Helen had been persuaded to retire early. He found her as he liked best to find her, midway between what he termed 'dressed up' and 'undressed,' an intermediate state of greater accessibility and tolerance.

"Hullo, little girl," he said, coming in with a rush and flinging both arms about her.

"Jack, dear," she whispered, half smothered.

"Now don't begin to be fidgety because I'm going away." He thought she was looking pale. "Is n't it what we have always wanted?"

She acquiesced. She had been putting his wardrobe in order, and he listened approvingly to the enumeration, less patiently to some counsels, but solemn in promises to do exactly as if she were there.

"It won't be *exactly* as if I were there, dear."

"It will if I promise, won't it?"

She did not reproach him for missing the point, and asked him about his journey with Mr. Fearing. Oh, he had had a glorious time! Mr. Fearing was splendid.

"What makes you like him so, Jack?"

"You asked me that question once before. I suppose it's partly because he likes me," he averred, laying hold of the profoundest of explanations.

"That can't be the only reason."

"It's one of them. Why, you've got a new cloak," he exclaimed, spying the garment over the back of a chair. "Let me see it on." He threw it over her. "You do look stunning in it!" and the arms went round her again. He felt the slight shudder of revulsion, and interpreted it laughingly after his own fashion. "I won't hurt the fur, dear. So Trécourt has gone."

"Yes."

"I like him too."

"Do you, dear? I am glad."

Something was knocking at the door of her heart, but Jack's thoughts were far afield.

"Mr. Fearing's got a ranch out West with real cowboys on it. He's going to let me go out there till school begins. Do you suppose there are any real Indians left? You know the buffaloes have gone long ago."

Helen laughed. "Oh, Jack, what a real boy you are!"

She was glad when his eyes grew heavy. The knocking at the door would not be denied. He made her promise to come and kiss him good-night when he was in bed — just for old time's sake. She promised.

A few minutes later — the rapidity of Jack's toilets was always a marvel — she had closed his door and, candle in hand, was standing at her grandmother's.

XXIV

WHEN Monsieur de Chavigny was starving the affections of his consort in the name of Principle and Duty, the latter had resorted to that great comforter of the oppressed, imagination. With its help she fed herself surreptitiously. When, for example, through the window of her coupé she saw a nurse approaching under the trees of the *allée*, she said to herself: 'There are my grandchildren taking the air — how pretty they are, the dears!' And while the coupé was rolling on she stopped it by a trick she was familiar with in order to alight, to pat their rosy cheeks and say: 'Good-morning, my children.' She lingered, too, for a moment's talk with the nurse, cautioning her to exercise great care at the crossings, and giving her much necessary advice before resuming her place in the coupé. In like manner, when the bell rang in the antechamber, without the least effort on her part she exclaimed: 'Ah, it is Hélène! I know by the sound. She always rings in that manner.' She played this game most successfully at night, as the pillow strained to her heart could testify. Unfortunately it was a game at which she never won. The children in the *allée* disappeared as do all phantoms; before the bell had ceased tinkling Jacques came with the bill of the fishmonger over

the way, and in the morning the pillow was wet with tears.

At present Madame de Chavigny was taking her revenge. From force of habit she continued her solitary game with Destiny, but she reversed her processes. When a carriage stopped before the archway and a light step fell on the staircase she said: 'It is that tiresome lodger on the floor above, what a noise he makes!' grumbling to herself till Helen was actually in her arms. As for the pillow, there were still tears upon it, but she did not mind them.

When her door opened on the evening of Helen's fitting, she had barely recovered from her anxiety. She caught a glimpse in the mirror of the figure in *robe-de-chambre*, advancing candle in hand. It was not because she thought her safe in bed that she refused to see her. Imagination, long trained to deception, saw in this figure a thief, come for the Chavigny emeralds. That these emeralds were at that moment in the Avenue Montaigne did not matter in the least. He approached warily, two strong arms clasped from behind about her neck held her firmly, she was about to be strangled —

"My child, how your heart is beating!"

"Grandmamma, I am a wicked, ungrateful girl — I have deceived you — I was at the dressmaker's — I was at the station, too — I went to say good-bye to Jean — wait, grandmamma, don't

speak — I can't tell you if you do — I *had* to go — and I'm glad — glad — glad — we love each other."

"Helen, Helen," gasped the old lady, struggling with the encircling arms. Something in her seemed to be giving way.

"Hush, — don't let us talk." She loosened her hold, sliding to the floor. "I'm too happy — and too miserable."

The fugitive smile quivered in the corners of the mouth, and the face was buried in the lap between the knees.

Miserable! It was pure happiness to lie there. Now at last that shyest and sturdiest flower of the human heart, which had opened in the flaring lights of the Lyons station, was in the sun.

XXV

FEARING was in the breakfast-room the next morning when Jack returned. Jack had had coffee in the Rue du Bac, but was not proof against the temptation of a 'real' breakfast.

"I only wanted to hug her once," Jack explained, "but she made me stay."

"Quite right," said Fearing, the curve of amusement deepening about the mouth. "Was she as glad to see you as you were to see her?"

"I should say so!" replied Jack; "she almost cried. Helen is n't used to crying. I suppose it's because I'm going away so soon. She's got a new cloak with fur on it," he added, giving his attention to the sole — for a page had just brought a telegram.

Fearing opened it carelessly, till he saw the date: Dijon, midnight. Who was telegraphing him from Dijon? He knew no one there. He glanced first at the signature — 'Madge.'

Ask the person you said you liked immensely who the Phyllis in the crimson cloak was in the arms of Corydon at the station to-night when the express left Paris for Marseilles. Hope you will find Broad Street tranquillizing. MADGE.

The meaning, though plain, sank slowly into consciousness. Plainer still was the intent, and

as he re-read the message the words became blurred and the face of Madge, the eyes hard with anger, stared at him from the blue-tinted paper.

'What a damnable lie!' he muttered, swept by a sudden gust of fury. But no! no conceivable malice was equal to such infernal invention. It was a mistake — of course it was a mistake!

Mechanically he folded the telegram and put it away in his pocket-book. Jack watched him thoughtfully. He had become accustomed to telegrams during the past week, but he set this one down as of exceptional importance.

"So Helen has a new cloak."

"Yes, a red one, with black fur on the collar and all round the edges. It's awfully becoming." He stopped. Clearly, thinking was going on, and he paid it the tribute of silence.

"Jack, I am to be busy to-day. You can have the car if you want it."

Jack's eyes followed him wonderingly as he left the room. Probably, he concluded, he's got a lot of letters to answer. He was always writing letters, and there was a whole bundle of them waiting for him last night. The rain was over. The first thing to do with liberty was to hunt up Felix and think of something to do with Helen.

At the door Fearing looked at his watch. It was early yet for Tatia, but waiting, groping about in the blackness of vain imaginings, was impossible.

At the Avenue Montaigne the porter was still

in his blue apron. On the approach of the visitor he darted into the lodge with his feather duster, to reappear in braided coat.

No, Monsieur le Prince had not yet gone to the Chancellerie.

"Take up my card," said Fearing shortly.

Dimitri was finishing breakfast, nothing on his face but the usual smile of cordial greeting. He had heard last night of their arrival. Jack had telephoned. Had they had a good run? Then Fearing burst out with: —

"Where's Helen?"

"Did n't Jack tell you? At Madame de Chavigny's."

"Yes, but what for?"

Dimitri looked puzzled. "Oh, a little change, a little rest." Then their eyes met and he added, "There's been no quarrel."

"Quarrel! Good God, man! One does n't quarrel with Helen!"

Dimitri smiled pleasantly. "No, nor with Tatia. But Tatia's a trifle hasty at times. She touched the wrong string, and it snapped."

"String! What string?"

"Quite against my advice. You know Tatia does n't take very kindly to advice."

"Will you be good enough to explain yourself, Dimitri? I am asking you instead of Helen. If you won't clear up this nightmare, she will."

The blank look of unfeigned surprise on Dimi-

tri's face was one of genuine amazement. The man speaking was not the man he knew.

"My dear fellow, there's no nightmare, and there's nothing for *men* to get excited over. Helen was rushing about town in your car — all very well while Jack was here to go with her. Tatia undertook to suggest —"

"Oh, is that all." He drew a long sigh of relief.

"That's all," assented Dimitri; unaware of Tatia's straying from first intentions. "Helen sent up a note yesterday with the breakfast-tray saying she was going to spend the night with Madame de Chavigny. It knocked up Tatia a bit, naturally."

Fearing put on his hat. There was evidently nothing to be learned from Dimitri. At the door he turned, flinging back the words with sudden energy.

"Tell Tatia to go and bring her back — have the splinter out! They're acting like children."

"Well, they *are* children," said Dimitri.

Something of Dimitri's optimism followed Fearing into the street. It *must* be a mistake, a drop of venom from a woman's tongue — a woman who sheltered herself behind her womanhood. The trees in the Avenue after the rain glistened in the sun, and a vision of freshness and purity came to him with an overwhelming sense of relief. One look into her face would clear the poison from his soul as the sun and rain had made the city clean.

Standing by the parapet at the end of the Avenue, in the brilliant sunshine he saw something else. That venomous little woman whom he had put off with banter was right. His very resentment of her intrusive familiarity was proof enough, if he needed proof — had been proof enough for her. What was he to do? Go and tell *her*. Of course. He took the telegram from his pocket, tore it into bits, and threw them into the river. He watched them, flecks dancing in the sunlight, but their message rankled in his heart, sombre, incomprehensible, monstrous. He recalled every moment they had shared together since their first meeting at the gate of the villa, every word she had uttered. And all that time — Jack had been only a subterfuge! Go and tell her, of course. Yet he found himself walking erratically along the quay, Madge's miserable lie stabbing him like a knife at every step. For it was a lie, pure invention, malice. Go and tell her, of course.

At the doorway in the Rue du Bac both cars were waiting. Felix and Peter. Jack had lost no time. The ugly temptation to ask Peter where he had been the night before flashed through his mind and was flung aside — into the gutter where it belonged with the mud and refuse of the street trickling to the sewer.

The subdued light and silence of Madame de Chavigny's salon were like a cool draught of water.

From the central space of the long side wall the portrait of the Count, the star on his breast, looked down upon him with the satisfied air of conscious rectitude. He moved about restlessly, waiting, listening for the coming footstep, to stop before a miniature framed in ebony on the table by the armchair — Hélène. The same firm little mouth, quick to smile or to quiver, the same slight tilt to the nose softening the expression of pride — Helen at the gate of the Villa Fontana. If the telegram were a lie, to put it under those eyes would be like fouling a mountain spring. If it were true — the humor of it brought a bitter laugh. From the face in the ebony frame he turned to the one on the wall. Nothing of hers there — nothing — and suddenly he heard the Princess Ghica saying: "Come to the point — a woman's face counts for something." What did it count for, for him, that it had not counted then?

"Mr. Fearing."

She had come in so quietly that the voice startled him, miniature in hand. She was dressed for the street, in the crimson cloak with the black fur Jack had declared so becoming — otherwise exactly the Helen he had left. What else in Heaven's name had he expected! Merely to look at her was answer enough.

"It's so like you," he said, putting down the miniature, "I hardly know which to speak to."

"I love to hear any one say that. We were going out, Jack and I. I am sorry."

"That's all right. I might have brought him back a day earlier, but the rain —"

"It does n't matter. We decided that once for all."

"Where are you going?" he asked, as Jack came in.

"I have left that to Jack. He likes to steer my ship. Not far. I am going first to Tatia's."

"I am glad of that."

She gave him a quick glance. "Have you seen her?"

"No."

"I have hurt her feelings. I am going to make amends."

"That's the right thing to do."

She gave him another queer little look which seemed to say: 'You don't know what you are talking about.' "I want you to promise me something. You said the other day I might cable you if I needed to. Will you promise to cable me if Jack needs me?"

"Of course I will. You can depend upon that."

"I do. I shall miss you both. It's day after to-morrow, is n't it?"

It's never if you say so — the words were on his lips — but he could not speak before Jack.

"Yes, day after to-morrow."

"Have you got your purse, Helen?" whispered

Jack as they passed out under the archway; "it's our last spree together, you know."

With the purse a little slip of yellow pasteboard came from the deep pocket and, fluttering idly, caught in the fur trimming of her cloak.

"It's nothing," she said to Fearing, shaking it free — "Good-bye" — and Peter threw in the clutch.

Fearing was staring at the yellow slip of pasteboard at his feet — the entrance pass for visitors to the platform of the Gare de Lyon.

XXVI

WHEN in trouble men resort to various harbors of refuge. Fearing's refuge was the desk in Broad Street. Its nearest substitute in Paris was closed. All the preparations for his departure were made. His passage had been secured, a compartment reserved in the Calais express, Helen's affairs at Murray Brothers' attended to. There was literally nothing remaining to do. The busy day he had spoken of to Jack vanished when the motor turned the corner at the foot of the street. Tatia had begged him to lunch with her and Dimitri, informally, a farewell luncheon, and he had accepted — but that was three hours away.

At one o'clock he was in the Avenue Montaigne, the three hours gone. He could not have told what he had been thinking in the interval, hard thinking with no progress or results. But he could have described minutely what he had done. He had dismissed Felix. Then there was a steamer which fussed and fumed along the brown river, stopping at innumerable landings. The wind on deck was cold and piercing. A man in a blue cotton blouse had talked to him volubly. There was a palace, more or less in ruins, the gardens converted to public use — desolate in winter. Then the steamer again and a terrace with a wide view,

deserted, wind-swept — pictures on a museum wall of cave men and women, one woman almost naked, with long, dishevelled hair and timid, appealing eyes — and cases full of flint implements — and a forest, leafless — one old man, bent over, was gathering fagots — then the steamer again, and now the porter in his braided coat — pictures stamped as it were while he was absent on the plates of memory.

Dimitri welcomed him cordially, but was more taciturn than usual. No reference was made to his earlier visit. They talked about nothing. Tatia would be in directly. He, Dimitri, had just got back from the Embassy. Would he have a bit of caviar and a glass of vodka while waiting for Tatia? Then Tatia burst in like a tornado, herself bursting with information.

"Dimitri, Helen has been here — she and Trécourt — it is all settled —" Then she stopped short, catching sight of Fearing sitting apart in the embrasure of the window. On his face she read what every woman reads best, and her own went white. The woman of the Siberian proverb had smiled upon him and he was undone.

Fearing sprang to his feet. "Run, Dimitri, quick — some water — the Princess is fainting."

Dimitri knew that Tatia never fainted. Nevertheless he ran.

"Oh, David!" she moaned. The tears were running down her cheeks.

"That's very nice of you, Tatia," he said, taking her hands and covering them in his own; "nobody's called me that since I was a boy. But you are not fainting properly enough for Dimitri."

She straightened up. "You iron man!" she whispered.

"That's what I thought myself. I told you once you were a terrible eavesdropper." He pressed her hand for silence as Dimitri came in. "It's nothing," he said; "when a woman can cry she's all right. I'll run in again. If not, you will all be at the station Saturday."

Tatia was staring into Dimitri's face.

"I knew it this morning," he said.

Walking down the Avenue slowly, Fearing tore a yellow slip of pasteboard in pieces and threw them in the gutter. What a fool he had been to think she had ever had anything to conceal! The bitter shame of feeling that she had ever been in need of reinstatement! Still, that thought was uppermost, that she was back again on her pedestal — for him a sort of plank to cling to in shipwreck.

Down the Avenue, across the Place, and into the Rue Royale, without any conscious sense of direction, he found himself standing before a window brilliant with jewels, as once he had stood before the vitrine in the Majestic at Nice — long ago!

After a moment he went in.

"Show me something in pearls," he said.

The head of the house came forward instantly. Like the rest of the world he saw that he had to do with a man who was serious.

"Is that the best you have?" asked Fearing, looking over the display set before him.

"Ah, if monsieur desires something really good" — the doors of the safe swung aside — "something unique, which cannot be equalled in Paris — something we have been years in collecting — " It was impossible to say whether this impassive customer was dazzled or indifferent. "Naturally, one cannot have a thing like this — see how perfectly they are matched — "

"I was n't thinking of the price," said Fearing dryly.

The shoulders lifted.

Fearing walked to the door, then came back. "Do you know Murray — bankers?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"Well, have them insured and send them round to Murray. He will have instructions."

In the street once more his step quickened. If he had wronged her in thought — well, this was the best he could do in atonement.

At his hotel he went into the writing-room, sat thoughtfully for a moment, then took up a pen.

My dear Mrs. Stuart, —

I leave Saturday for Broad Street. Why do you telegraph in cipher when every one has the code? For

a usually well-informed person you are decidedly behind the times. So I must help you out. Miss Lee's engagement to Jean de Trécourt will undoubtedly be announced soon in the proper manner. Of course we are all pleased.

After addressing the envelope he tore it up. "No," he said, "that's worth a cable." And he took his letter-sheet to the telegraph office.

XXVII

"If agreeable to you we will lower this green shade. One must sleep when one can."

The voice seemed to come from some immeasurable distance. Opening his eyes, Jean saw his fellow passenger in the far corner of the compartment, who, after shielding his eyes from the glare of the light overhead, had spread his travelling-rug over his knees, pulled the black skull-cap firmly down about his ears, and was composing himself for sleep.

Clinging with all the strength of his will and memory to that moment of rapture and misery into which all life was concentrated, he hated this placid man who could so smile and sleep.

To sleep! To be carried off like a bundle of straw by this brutal mass of iron and steel, not to know what this moment she was thinking, doing, suffering! What were honors, mission, career, while those consenting lips were fresh upon his own with a reality to which memory could add nothing! How could he have been so blind, loitering like a timid child at the wide-open gates of Paradise! Child he had been, child he would be no longer. Struggling with the tumult of his heart, out of the chaos one purpose rose irresistible, triumphant. At the first stop he would leave the train and

return to Paris. Should he hesitate to throw to the winds the less dear for the dearer?

Opening the door into the corridor, he called the guard and gave the necessary instructions for the disposition of his luggage.

"Monsieur!" It was the wearer of the black skull-cap, whose slumber he was disturbing. "Have I by any chance the good fortune to address Monsieur Jean de Trécourt?"

"That is my name."

"Capital!" smiled his companion still more affably and ignoring the curt tone of the reply; "you save me all further trouble. I was counting upon the pleasure of making your acquaintance in Marseilles when by good luck I observed those initials on your portmanteau. You are sailing to-morrow night on the Toulon for Corea."

"You are well informed," said Jean, making no effort to conceal his annoyance.

"That is my business," said the stranger in his soft voice of even politeness, "but to avoid all possibility of error, since initials are often deceptive —"

"This is too much!" cried Jean, exasperated beyond control; "one would say I was a criminal under investigation."

"Pardon me; if I had my doubts I have them no longer. Your just anger dissipates them. But in matters of importance one must proceed with caution. Once, when a young man like yourself,

I made a mistake which cost me dear and which I cannot afford to repeat." He was unlocking the leather case on his knees. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am the official bearer of despatches at the Ministry, a humble colleague, on my way to Morocco, and I have here for you" — taking a portfolio from the box and extracting two enveopes — "documents destined for the Russian Agency in Cairo."

"But I am not going to Cairo," cried Jean, whose irritation was getting out of bounds.

"Ah, as to that I have nothing to say. In confiding to you these documents my responsibility is ended. Here they are — verify them, I beg of you, at your leisure. This one" — he scrutinized the address carefully — "with the seal of the Russian Embassy, for the Agency in Cairo, and this one, for you personally, from the Ministry."

Standing under the light, Jean read the superscriptions. It was quite true, they were as stated. Impatiently he broke the seal of the smaller envelope. Glancing down to the signature, his eye caught the closing sentence: —

These papers, of the highest importance, you will deliver in person, proceeding thereafter without delay by the first steamer to your post.

Below, in the scrawling hand of one for whom a signature was a tiresome formality, was the word: "Coulomb."

With that word came the realization that he

was no longer free. Then, faster than the train speeding through the night, there rushed through his brain confused thoughts, plans discarded as soon as formed, like the objects in the phantom landscape hurrying by the window, and back of all the passionate desire to hold her again as he had held her for one fleeting moment forced its way through the tumult of indecision regardless of consequences. With that desire there was no arguing, no reasoning. What should he say to her? That he loved her? Just that? Was that enough? He would have to be truthful — anything less than absolute candor was impossible, unthinkable. He would have to persuade her that nothing but love counted. Would that satisfy her? She had said he was a child, and like a child he was ready to throw everything away.

"Yes," he murmured, "as you say, it is from Coulomb."

"So! it is from Coulomb himself? and he does not consult you! It is a habit they have at the Ministry. But console yourself. You do Cairo injustice. It is a most interesting city and boasts of many agreeable diversions. I would willingly pass a week there myself. It would be absurd to suppose that all the charms of Egypt perished with the asp of Cleopatra." Furious at this garrulity, Jean flashed a look of contempt at his tormentor who was offering him his stylographic pen. "Pardon me — a mere formality — here is my receipt.

Thanks. And now that we have discharged our duty" — settling himself once more in his corner — "let us sleep. For, evidently, one must sleep when one can. At your service, Monsieur de Trécourt. Good-night."

Jean sank into his seat. No longer free! The words repeated themselves incessantly, mechanically. The little old man in the corner in discharging his responsibility had bound him fast with the bonds of duty and honor. To-morrow he would be in Marseilles — in four days Cairo — but afterwards —

On the shelf by the window, beside the hideous ash-tray, were hotel circulars, time-tables, telegram blanks — these would do! The breathing of his companion had become regular and deep. He raised cautiously the green shade on the side nearest him, and feverishly, against the tremor of the train which conspired with the trouble of his brain, he began to write — words, words, words, vessels into which he poured out his heart, yet which remained ever empty.

At Dijon, while Mrs. Stuart was feeing the guard to deliver her telegram, he had barely time to obtain an envelope and drop it in the letter-box of the station.

Addressed to the Avenue Montaigne, it fell into Dimitri's hands. Observing the pencilled superscription and postmark, he smiled, and sent it over by special messenger to the Rue du Bac.

Helen had just returned from her drive with Jack. Confidently expected and eagerly awaited as this letter was, now that it had come she could only hold it tight in her hand, sitting by the window where, the night before, she had looked out into the driving rain listening irresolute to the voice that called her, and yielded. Once more she heard that voice again, a bolder challenge. There was no need to read. She knew beforehand all he would say, for she knew him. He would come back, abandon everything, sacrifice his career; and every passionate appeal, against which she would have to struggle, she would love the best, in her own longing to be sheltered as well as to shelter, to be held as well as to hold, to cease struggling, shut her eyes in surrender and let the flood have its way. Once she had thought she knew the meaning of separation — Jack, too, in his way. Yet neither had hesitated. This was different, the rending of flesh and spirit. Corea! How far away it was! And Uncle Hector's money, what else was it for! One day, at Tatia's, she had overheard Monsieur Saranow saying: "Love is like a young animal, charming only in youth." What if life should one day deny her all she now longed for so passionately — all within her grasp! She bent her head over her desk on Jean's pages, weeping, silently, repeating to herself: 'It is not true, it is not true.'

She took up Jean's letter again. Suddenly,

with the last page, came the realization that she must stop thinking, dreaming, *instantly*. She thrust the pages out of sight in her desk and began to write, in desperate haste, armed with that weapon of sacrificial love forged in the long years of her mothering of Jack.

I have written you a thousand times since — always to the same end. No, I do not reproach you for a single word, for anything you have done. You forbid me to treat you any longer as a child. How can you remember — and think so! How can you think that I disparage that very quality in you which attracts me, and alas! fills me with alarm. Reproach me rather for having in abandoning to you all that is most precious to me risked all that is most precious to you. Let us, as you once said to me, think and speak with the candor of children, but let us not act with their indifference to consequences. You are going to Egypt. I knew it, for Monsieur Saranow was here when I returned, and he told me. Afterwards, you would come back, abandon for my sake your present prospects. You undertake to reconcile your father to this course. Ah, Jean dear, it is I whom you seek to reconcile. Think how many things must combine to form happiness! If my heart tells me love were enough for mine, reason tells me it is not sufficient for yours. No, no, you are not a child, and without that success necessary to the man happiness would be only a phantom. Do not think I hold lightly the sacrifices you wish to make. At the same moment that I resist you I yield to you. It breaks my heart to leave at my feet the dear gifts you place there. Is it love that leaves them there, or this torturing tyranny of reason that warns me not to stand in your way — I who ask only to stand at your side?

Both — for if there is no love in reason there is reason in love.

I am going to bare my whole heart to you. Why should I recoil from saying to you with this pen what I should say if you were here? Till you came it knew but one love — so different and yet so like what I have given you — my brother. He is about to leave me. If in his interest I have the courage to let him go from my arms, shall I be more selfish with what is dearer to me! Who will reconcile *you* if your career is broken? I! Yes, if Heaven should break you in body or spirit and that were permitted me. But what shall I avail if disappointment comes through love itself, through me! Give yourself to me, dear Jean, as I gave myself to you once and forever, and do not believe that in yielding to reason I withhold anything from you.

I ask myself if you were here should I have the courage to say this to you. Do not ask me. What is a little patience, a few years even if need be, to us who have all life to consecrate to each other? Answer me with your own courage, as I have answered you, as I speak to you now, with the best that is in your heart.

HELEN.

Dear — you may write to me — about the Corean lions.

She wrote the last words with the ghost of a smile, and not daring to re-read, sealed the envelope quickly, wrote the address he had given, and posted her letter with her own hand.

XXVIII

THE day had proved one to be long remembered in Jacques's calendar, the clockwork of his regular duties having been thrown out of gear by a variety of unusual occurrences. To begin with, before he had opened the salon shutters or changed the water in the vases Madame la Comtesse had sent him to the stand on the Quai Voltaire for a carriage, and had departed wearing her best mantle, the mantle reserved for occasions of ceremony, without vouchsafing a word of explanation — an unheard-of proceeding. Never before had she failed to honor him with her confidence. Where was she going? To mass? She had no prayer-book. To market? In the mantle? — impossible. She had not been to market since — when was it madame last went to market? He was wrestling with this problem when the fiacre rumbled out of sight.

Then the American gentleman, held in much awe as the guardian of wealth, had called, and with Master Jack and mademoiselle had departed, also without leaving any orders. At what hour was dinner to be served? *Nom de Dieu!* It was humiliating to be so ignored. That madame should remain away overnight was incredible. Such a thing had not happened since the death

of monsieur. Where, moreover? — and without maid or portmanteau! Yet at nightfall she was still abroad. Under the archway, searching both ends of the street and peering into every passing carriage, he was in despair.

Meanwhile, Madame de Chavigny, returning from Avrincourt, was observing with satisfaction from the car window the first faint signs of spring in the orchards, and resolving to hasten her departure to the country. She was further enjoying the fact that she had accomplished her mission with tact and delicacy; that she had, as she phrased it, "regularized" the situation, while remaining loyal to Helen's confidences. To be the sole possessor of these confidences was like manna in the wilderness to her. It pleased her enormously to have the conduct of affairs in her own hands. She had lost no time in taking command, having determined promptly upon the necessary measures even before Helen had finished her confession. These measures were so eminently proper that she quite forgot at how late a stage her assistance had been invoked.

On her way to Avrincourt she gave much thought to what she should say, also to what she should withhold, entreating the Recording Angel to deal leniently with any venial suppression of the truth. Much as it had to do with the matter, the sudden efflorescence of love in the Lyons station must be ignored. It was quite unnecessary to

spread such a detail before profane eyes. Her own pride as well as Helen's forbade it. Confidences of this kind were for the confessional of the good God.

There were other prudential considerations also, not to be sacrificed to avarice by inopportune disclosures. It were far better to put all questions of sentiment wholly aside. Motives of expediency, the duty of parents who look into the future, were sufficient for her purpose without dragging in passion. Indeed, it would be impossible to reconcile passion with Jean's silent departure. She thought of Hélène. Ah, what things went on under one's very eyes!

The certainty that the Marquis de Trécourt, whom early prodigalities had reduced to the necessity of making the most of a small estate in the country, would not fail to see the alluring side of her proposition, gave her also much concern while watching the first flush of spring on the lindens.

At the very outset of her interview it became clear that the Marquis was not oblivious to this consideration. Nor was he slow to enquire why Madame la Comtesse had delayed her visit till after Jean's departure for Corea. Her answer was ready. Jean's deportment had been quite correct and in this respect left nothing to be desired. It was at this point that she offered up her petition to the Recording Angel.

Visibly affected both by Jean's correct conduct and the prospect of a financial arrangement welcome to one in his circumstances, the Marquis de Trécourt felt it incumbent upon him to produce corresponding advantages of his own. This he proceeded to do with a certain fine condescension. He pointed out that Jean had no debts, that he had been singularly deficient in the irregularities incident to his age. He even conveyed the impression that it was easier to pardon irregularities of this nature than to explain their absence. Jean had inherited from his mother what it pleased the Marquis to call a levity of disposition which, however charming in a woman, had caused him much anxiety; because, being constitutional and persistent, it was more disheartening than a merely temporary lapse with folly. If, without passing through that morass in which men became entangled before establishing themselves all the more firmly on the foundations of duty, he should give evidence of recognizing the seriousness of life and of conforming to the standards of tradition, he, the Marquis, would be delighted. Jean had now a career. It was a fitting moment to consider the future and his obligations to society. He, the Marquis, would gladly ascertain to what extent the sentiments of his son agreed with those of Madame la Comtesse. Had she any reason to believe that mademoiselle would be favorably disposed?

Listening to these fine speeches with an equally fine reserve and dignity, Madame de Chavigny replied that she would lay his proposal before her granddaughter. Having thus shifted the initiative from her own shoulders, she evaded further insistence upon prudential questions by retreating behind the person of Mr. Fearing.

"A fine prudence, forsooth," she said to herself, "when all the honey is in one comb!"

On reaching Paris she passed by the Avenue Montaigne to inform the Princess that the Marquis de Trécourt had asked the hand of Helen for his son.

There remained the question of the immediate future. On this question also she had made up her mind while listening to Helen's confidences. Having been denied much happiness herself, she was prodigal of that commodity for others. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, therefore, and the fatigues of the day, still bent upon the pursuit of happiness, from the Avenue Montaigne she went to the Quai d'Orsay.

Fortune smiled upon her. The Minister was in.

"To what god do I owe the honor of a visit from you, dear madame?" said Coulomb, coming to meet her with outstretched hands, and closing behind her the door of the antechamber.

Madame de Chavigny, adjusting her mantle and taking the proffered chair, seized the cue promptly.

"To the god for whom even the portfolio of a Minister is not sacred."

"Dear madame," said Coulomb evasively.

Undaunted in her pursuit of a thing so elusive as happiness, Madame de Chavigny opened her batteries at once.

"The Marquis de Trécourt has to-day asked the hand of my granddaughter for his son —"

"What! that charming person —"

"But most unhappy," interrupted Madame de Chavigny, "for you take this occasion to exile Jean de Trécourt to Corea. On what map I ask myself is this Corea? For what interests of the State is this young man so important to Corea that hearts should suffer?"

The wrinkles of anxiety on Coulomb's forehead were disappearing and those about the mouth broke into a benevolent smile.

"My dear Countess," he implored, "not another word, I beg of you. What Louis XIV attempted to do with the Pyrenees on a like occasion we will do for Corea. It no longer exists."

"You promise me?"

"With all my heart. What you ask is nothing — a mere nothing."

"Far from it," she replied, resorting to her handkerchief, as he bent over her hand; "I was about to enter upon second childhood — instead of which you restore to me my youth."

XXIX

THEY were all at the station.

Jack came with Helen. They had spent the last night together. Important, like all departing heroes, his spirits were high. While Helen was verifying his various impedimenta in the compartment, the others stood talking outside.

"For Heaven's sake, don't cry, Helen," said Jack in a whisper. "And you need n't tell me again to be good. I will if I can."

She kissed him once, twice.

"I wish it were Mr. Fearing instead of Jean," he said between the kisses; "then you would be going too."

"Don't tell that to Mr. Fearing, dear."

"I have."

"Jack!"

"Oh, he did n't mind," said Jack cheerfully.

When Helen came out Tatia dragged Dimitri to the window and engaged Jack in an animated conversation.

Helen and Fearing walked a little way down the platform. He had not seen her since the yellow pasteboard had fluttered from her pocket in the Rue du Bac. It was necessary to say something.

"I wish you a great deal of happiness, Miss Lee."

In spite of the sincerity, the words seemed commonplace and the voice sounded hollow to him.

"That's a long way off." However far away it might be, the reality of it was in every elastic step. "I think you might call me Helen to-day," she said, looking up into his face.

"I would have liked to from the beginning."

She turned her face to his again. "Why did n't you? You deserve a great deal more than that."

"I think, on the whole, I have been a little afraid of you."

She laughed gayly. "Afraid of me! You! How absurd!"

The guards were beginning to close the doors.

"We must not get too far away," he said, turning.

Her face became grave again. "You will write — often — Jack's letters will not tell all I want to know —" And, after a pause, "It is as impossible for me to thank you as it was to give you that louis. I am poorer now than I was then."

"Poor!" He checked himself. "Don't forget how to make out your drafts," he said, laughing.

He had made the grave little mouth break into a smile. She gave him her hand as he went up the steps. Then the train began to move.

"Good-bye!" shouted Jack. His white handkerchief was fluttering at the window as long as he could distinguish the red cloak on the receding

platform. Settling himself in his corner seat he heaved a deep sigh of relief. "She's always game," he said. "I was afraid she would cry. When do we get to Calais?"

In the motor the Princess also was busy with a handkerchief. Helen reached for her hand.

"It's all right, Tatia dear. Jack's safe with him."

Tatia choked back a sob and nodded. It would never do for her to know!

Tatia was wretchedly unhappy. Everything in the world was going awry. What a pitiful thing it was to live! Did God concern Himself about anything? Who was responsible, if not Heaven, for all this misery? Was any one happy? Not Fearing, certainly, on the way to America, nor Jean, on the way to Corea. Helen, then, with her fine ideas of duty and conscience! Bah! Tatia's ill-humor veered from Heaven to the solitary woman in the Villa Fontana. From what other source could such a black drop of conscience come!

With every answer to her self-questionings her ill-humor increased. Fearing was gone — what else could he do? Madame de Chavigny was leaving for the country — had she not the right to choose her own time? Helen accompanied her — was she to be censured for loving her grandmother? The proposal of the Marquis de Trécourt had

been accepted — was not that what she, Tatia, had desired? Who would have thought that Fearing, that man of pure business — Tatia drew a profound sigh.

Having deposited Helen and Madame de Chavigny in the Rue du Bac, the motor went on to the Avenue Montaigne. A mournful atmosphere of vacancy and depression pervaded the apartment. One glance at the empty seat behind the samovar completed the deception. It was no longer home. She ordered the motor again and went to the Embassy.

Alexis, in the private room of the Chancellerie, looked up from his papers with surprise.

"Why, Tatia," he exclaimed, "at this hour!"

"I am not welcome?" she asked irritably.

"On the contrary, the more so because unexpected. What can I do for you?"

"A cup of tea, and company."

Alexis smiled. He said to himself that handing over Helen to her rightful owner had not improved his cousin's temper. He drew his chair beside her and rang for tea.

"So Madame de Chavigny is going into the country."

Tatia nodded. "But why so early?"

"Did you expect her to wait for the culmination of the social season?" she asked sarcastically.

"But, my dear Tatia, the crocuses are not yet out."

"When you are seventy, my dear Alexis, you will not wait for the crocuses."

"Seventy-three," he corrected.

"Besides," she went on with a scornful disregard for accuracy, "when one has waited till seventy to taste happiness one becomes greedy."

"Seventy-three, think of it! What you say is quite just. I compliment you on your generosity, Tatia, though you might display it more graciously."

"I am not seventy, and I am not generous."

Alexis smiled again.

"If we could but ring up the curtain as they do at the theatre," she sighed, "and say, two years are supposed to have elapsed."

"Heavens! Tatia, what a spendthrift you are! Do be less reckless with the years, I implore you. You married women amaze me. You know very well that when the fairy tale ends the real story begins — yet you are not afraid."

Tatia gave her cousin her smile of superior wisdom. "I do not pretend to rival you in experience, Alexis, but there are things of which you are ignorant."

It occurred to him to retort that there were others of which she knew nothing, but for the moment he contented himself with thinking it.

"Well, I am going," she said, sighing again. "Will you tell Dimitri I am here?"

"One moment, please. We were speaking of

things of which we are ignorant. Yesterday I was at the Foreign Office. It was the day for ambassadors. It seems it was the day for exceptional visitors also. There were five of us in the antechamber. 'Who is with His Excellency?' I asked. They shrugged their shoulders after the manner of ambassadors jealous of their prerogatives. Presently the usher threw open the door and announced me. 'A thousand pardons for keeping you waiting,' Coulomb said to me. 'Do not speak of it,' I replied; 'I came only to pay my respects, and as I have left four of my colleagues yonder —' 'Sit down,' he said, laughing; 'I have something to confide to you — in fact a confession, a State secret.' Now you know, Tatia, the joy of receiving a secret consists chiefly in sharing it."

Tatia pricked up her ears.

"'Do you remember,' he began, 'that young man of whom we were speaking lately at the Princess's dinner?' 'Trécourt,' I replied; 'certainly.' 'It appears that he is in love with that young person who sat beside him at the far end of the table.' 'Precisely,' I said; 'the granddaughter of Madame de Chavigny.' 'It was Madame de Chavigny,' he said, waving his hand in the direction of the ante-room, 'who just now kept the representatives of five Great Powers waiting, and who, before leaving, extracted from me the promise to recall this young dog from Corea — Egypt — wherever he may be — and while listening to

her I saw constantly that charming face, so fresh, and so troubled, between the flowers and candelabra at the end of the Princess's table. Sometimes' — he carried his hand to his head with a gesture of weariness — 'sometimes one receives an impression for which one cannot account — a strain of music, a passing perfume; and just now, while Madame de Chavigny was speaking to me, it was the voice of that troubled face which I heard speaking, not hers — and there came to me in this room where I was waiting for you a vision of past days, when I was young, of things forgotten, the songs of nightingales, the scent of new-mown hay — and I promised.' Positively, Tatia, it was extraordinary. I was dumb with astonishment. You know how corpulent he is, how his fat fingers tap listlessly on the table. At last I managed to say, 'You did well. Of what importance to Corea is Monsieur de Trécourt? You yourself told me' — 'None,' he said, 'none whatever — but I wish to think that I did what I have done because of that troubled face I saw among the flowers at the end of the table. How many, do you say, are in the antechamber?' I pressed his hand and came away in silence."

He touched the bell on the desk. "Say to the Prince his carriage is waiting."

Speechless, Tatia had the appearance of a child about to cry.

"Now we see," he smiled, "why Madame de

Chavigny does not wait for the crocuses. I am convinced that down there in Touraine she is preparing one of those surprises which do not depend upon the season."

He put his finger to his lips for silence as Dimitri entered. "Dimitri excepted, naturally," he said.

If the slips of yellow pasteboard floating idly in the current along the curbing could have told their story, various mysteries on Tatia's horizon would have been cleared away. Neither Helen's rebuff nor Jean's avowal of discomfiture had shaken the tenacity of her intuitions. She was not in the least surprised by Madame de Chavigny's announcement, but she was mystified. There was one very simple way of solving the mystery, and in the first outburst of feeling she had very nearly sought illumination at the source itself. But Helen, less accessible than in the days of the Villa Fontana, furnished none of those enlightening details for which she hungered. She had met Tatia's advances with the old naïve frankness, a frankness, however, tempered by an equally naïve reserve. The Princess had not forgotten that she had recently broken into that reserve with disastrous results. Profoundly ignorant as she was of the gust of passion in the Lyons station, she was not the less convinced that something had changed a girl into a woman.

Returning from the Embassy, she also was a

changed person — swept by the desire to fly then and there into Helen's arms — instead of which she asked Dimitri if he could keep a secret, and acquainted him with her cousin's method of enjoying one.

XXX

THE tide of life flowing past the terrace at Shepheard's was at its full, for it was the tea-hour. Moreover, the end of the season was drawing near and the prey was about to escape. Every vender of spurious antiquities, every snake-charmer, juggler, and lier-in-wait for piastres who could escape the fire-carriage of the infidel and elude the vigilance of the solitary guardian of the peace assigned to the maintenance of circulation along the terrace rail was at his post, eloquent of speech and eye and resplendent in local color.

Against all these attractions the guests about Mrs. Stuart's table were proof. She herself had long since graduated from the vulgar interest in all that constitutes the charm for the Cairo tourist. Her present interest was the young officer on the Sirdar's staff, the English doctor and his wife from Gezîreh, an archæologist from the Sudan, and the French Diplomatic Agent, her afternoon guests. All these people had also acquired that indifference to local color which distinguishes the resident from the travelling guild. So the local color, ebbing and flowing under the terrace railing, in wise recognition of unlawful prey, left them in tranquillity.

In white from head to foot, her blue eyes very

much alive, Mrs. Stuart was exhibiting a sapphire bracelet which the Ceylon merchant in the hotel corridor had insisted she should keep, "just to look at," overnight.

"He knows very well I am going up the river to-morrow," she was saying.

"Are n't you rather late in starting, Mrs. Stuart?" asked the young officer.

"Oh, no, I'm going to be towed, anyway. The crowd will be gone. I've seen all the stuffy monuments, you know. It's sunsets I am after, and peace, before the London season." She held the bracelet up to the light. "I really don't want it. He asks three hundred pounds for it. What do you think?"

"It's a jolly good color," said the officer, "and a jolly good price. You won't get it for less, mind you. These Ceylon beggars have got the *prix fixe* into their heads and won't be budged an inch."

Mrs. Stuart laughed. "But it *is* pretty. I wonder if it is really worth it."

Just then a messenger from the office whispered something to the doctor, who rose, excusing himself, and went into the hotel.

"Doctors have no rest," remarked his wife. "It's a villainous profession."

Mrs. Stuart dropped the sapphires in her lap. "I wish I knew how many flaws there are in the stones. Three hundred is such a lot."

The "just to look at" potion was beginning to work.

The archæologist took out his pocket microscope, the band struck in, and conversation ceased.

Presently came back the doctor.

Mrs. Stuart looked up smiling. "You were n't long, were you. I have just ordered a fresh brew and hot toast."

But he did not sit down. He pushed a card over to the French Agent. "It's one of your people," he said laconically.

"Trécourt! What's wrong with him? Why, he was at the Agency this morning enquiring for letters."

"He ought to have been in bed — long ago, for that matter," was the dry reply.

"And he is sailing for the East by the next steamer."

"You can cancel his booking without risk. He's going to-night to the hospital."

Mrs. Stuart sat up suddenly, her blue eyes dilating, and reached for the card.

"Trécourt! You don't mean Jean de Trécourt! Why, I know him intimately" — in moments of excitement Mrs. Stuart paid scant regard to strict accuracy — "he's engaged to one of my dearest friends. I have just had a cable announcing the engagement."

"I am sorry," said the doctor; "I mean I am sorry to think you are off to-morrow. A woman

friend is a good thing for a man in a Cairo hospital to have."

Mrs. Stuart did not stop to think twice. The good like the evil in her bubbled up instantly.

"I shall do nothing of the sort. I would n't think of leaving. You don't mean —" She looked up anxiously.

"My dear lady, I can tell you better what I mean to-morrow. If you like I will call in the morning."

He held out his hand, and the party broke up.

"Nothing serious?" said the French Agent, interrogatively, to the doctor as they went down the steps together.

"Typhoid's always a worry," was the reply.

The following morning, and thereafter, Mrs. Stuart rode roughshod over hospital rules and regulations. It were unkind to trace the thread of motive in the web of her procedure. The English doctor saw only the quick decision, the instant sacrifice of personal plans. Being quick of decision himself, and warm-hearted under a cold exterior, he admired Mrs. Stuart greatly for what he told his wife was "a fine piece of work," and winked at the disregard of rule. Mrs. Stuart loved the approbation and admiration of others. It was far dearer to her than her own. If ultimately the approval of conscience added its tonic contribution, so much the better. It could not fairly be said to be the inspiring motive. Nor was it alto-

gether a pose. Having seen what was the heroic thing to do, she seized upon it, and immediately lost herself in her rôle — perhaps, too, found herself, the inherent good slumbering under the crust of her social code.

The man who had bored her so in the Avenue Montaigne was astonished to see this dainty figure in white installed at his bedside. She had to remind him where he had seen her before, to make clear the reasons for her presence. They were not very clear to him, but he was hot, tired, lonely, and reasoning was an effort. Gradually his first shrinking yielded to her cool presence, to the woman in her which was not in the nurse, to the appeal of the sympathy he could not wholly account for, but which, at any rate, was not professional. Then, too, she was a tie with the past, and her face melted into one he dreamed of when sinking into the hollows of feverish sleep.

Night and morning he asked wistfully for the mail, and night and morning Mrs. Stuart, on her way to and from the hospital, called at the Agency. She was rewarded at last one evening by a letter with a Paris postmark, and late though it was, drove back to deliver it with her own hand.

He held it, unopened, under his pillow. She read the gratitude in the hollow eyes and left him, tactfully, firm in the belief that it was more than any prescription. He read it, a sentence now

and then, in the night watches, when the nurse, busy with other duties, gave him opportunity, scorning the reason and seeing only the love. Its radiance blinded him — it was too wonderful — all the rest pure waste of ink. Through the long night, between the snatches of fitful sleep, tossed, like a ship adrift, on the tides of love and reason, he strove with what he should say, what he should write, to-morrow, when he was stronger, holding fast the wandering thoughts always slipping away into nothingness. It was enough that she should ask. How could he resist her who had both love and reason on her side — how, if he did not obey her now, could he persuade her that he would obey her hereafter — what else was this appeal to reason but the measure of her self-sacrificing love — no — he would not permit it — he would be a boy no more — master —

When morning came he found a hand fast in his, and drew away, flushing.

"I thought it was the lever," he whispered, "I was flying."

Madge spoke up promptly, authoritatively, with a forced bravado and a brave smile, meeting his searching eyes unflinchingly — the assenting eyes of the stricken who has no strength for useless argument. "He knows," she thought. She could have kissed him, the mother in her near to getting the upper hand.

Jim had always said, "No kids for me!" and

she had acquiesced. Driving out to Gezîreh, for she had missed the doctor's morning call, she wondered.

The doctor came down to the gate.

"No, I won't get out," she said. "I wanted the air, and to be stiffened up a bit. Can't you do it?"

"There's a trite saying about hope and life" — he paused a moment — "I wish I could."

"He had a letter last night, Doctor. I thought it might save him."

"Yes, I know — they do, in some cases."

Her voice broke. "You mean it has happened — what you feared?"

"Yes," he said; "it has happened."

So the day dreaded came. She was there, calm and dry-eyed, as usual.

"There is nothing more I can do, Mrs. Stuart — nor you," she heard the doctor saying. "You had better go."

She gave him a reproachful look. He beckoned her aside.

"It's ghastly," he said. "They had a message at the Agency last night — a telegram recalling him — some billet in the Foreign Office. It's just as well he never knew. Who was it dreamed that all the unfulfilled hopes of his life came like birds and perched upon his coffin?"

An hour later she was driving back alone to Shepheard's, crying softly to herself, Helen's let-

ter in her hand, while the dragoman on the box called his warning "Oo-ah! Oo-ah!"

In her own room again, she dismissed the maid and, turning up the lowered night lamp, unfolded the crumpled letter. She knew very well that what she was doing was a shameful thing, yet she read it through, without compunction, from beginning to end with tears that helped to wash out the shame. The tears and the shame she understood, but they did not trouble her. A happiness, causeless, unaccountable, stirred in her breast, feelings long strangers to her, of envy for all she had thought to despise, of remorse for all she had counted no sin, of disgust for all that had been her pride, of yearning for what she had spurned and missed. They welled up like a fountain, obliterating even what she had just passed through — Jean's face, the silent few about the bed, the horrible hospital odor — setting her face to the future, flooding her whole being with the light of a new dawn. In that light all her wretched little world seemed to shrivel up and disappear. She found herself thinking confusedly of Jim, of the world she had dreamed of when a girl. It still existed. By some miracle it was coming to meet her with its forgotten promises and hopes. Thank God, they had not come too late to perch upon her coffin lid. She was alive, in her warm bed, and despite the tears and the shame and the violated letter under her pillow, she smiled in her sleep.

In the morning she wrote Jim she was coming home.

Jim was amazed. The abandoned dahabiyeh lying provisioned above the Nile Bridge represented such a lot of wasted money, and feminine caprice!

XXXI

THERE was something sweet and wholesome about the small house, for small it was in comparison with its princely neighbors, though known in the near-by cluster of cottages as the 'château.' Boasting neither legends nor history, only age, no tourists invaded its seclusion, and like the little village, too insignificant to be found on the maps, it was unknown to the guidebooks. Hidden behind the screen of trees standing guard along its high encircling wall, travellers on the main road passed it by, unsuspecting, and only to the cowherd in the pastures beyond the river was it visible through the opening of the sycamores — a white patch against the green background.

Regularly once a year it shook itself from its torpor, opened wide its shutters, and became distinctly animate. And regularly once a year, when Madame la Comtesse rumbled away behind the stout draft horses to the railway station, it shut its eyes for the long nap of winter.

Helen fell in love with it at first sight. After Paris, the endless round of visits, the wearisome formalities of society, the never-ending roar of the sleepless streets, to open her window to the young buds on the climbing vines, to the glint of the river beyond which the cattle were browsing

on the level meadows, was enchantment. Below, the balustrade of the terrace guarded the door from too instant intrusion, and three steps led down to the straight path dividing the lawn and inviting her to come with it to the murmuring river.

Because there was nothing to remind her of the Villa Fontana, she was constantly thinking of it. Contrast was more effective than resemblance in awakening memory. What different things in the same liquid language with which the blue sea had talked to the oleanders the river was saying to the sycamores. Neither Africa nor Asia had contributed anything to the homely garden where Madame de Chavigny, the very morning after their arrival, was pruning the budding rose-trees under her broad-brimmed hat. Everything was in its own place — which would have pleased Mr. Fearing! — and everywhere was a brooding sense of friendliness.

Except for Jack, who was not wholly satisfying, and the occasional irruptions of Tatia, she had been alone in the Villa Fontana. It was no hardship now to be alone. There was always the path beckoning her into the future as the path from the three steps beckoned her to the river. Separation becomes a real pain only after fruition. To her, as to her grandmother, life had become infinitely precious — for one to lavish freely, for the other to treasure niggardly. And of all the contrasts

Madame de Chavigny in her rose-garden was the greatest. How tiresome it had been to make the grand round in the villas! "Helen," said Madame de Chavigny, looking up from her rose-tree, the scissors in her gloved hand, "how is it possible not to miss you!" Helen wondered.

The letter that came from Tatia, spiced with gossip, antidote for monotony, was wasted sympathy. "Do not worry about me, Tatia," she wrote in reply, "I am quite happy."

There had been duties in the Villa Fontana. But for Jack and Helen, the Villa Fontana was all duty, and it had never ceased to reach out its ghostly hand in its old compelling way. For it *was* a duty, that weekly letter, the only task left in the present. She had often asked herself whether it was worth the effort, whether happiness was a welcome offering on the villa altar, and had tried to soften and subdue its expression. To keep both happiness and duty out of a letter was not easy. There were times, too, when she wished her grandmother was even more sparing of the stray words of endearment scattered haphazard through her replies — unwilling guests that spoke their lines haltingly; and sometimes a sentence brought a smile: "Monsieur Hermite still enquires for you." "We are having much trouble with a disease in the *Picea Pungens* from Colorado."

It was easier to chronicle her day for Tatia's

benefit, though there was little to record — a stately visit from stately neighbors, a morning walk through clumps of chestnuts and patches of vineyard to the crooked streets of the village, a chat with the women knitting in the sun of the doorways or thumping the linen on the flat coping of the fountain, and when the weather was fine a longer excursion in the motor; for Peter had inspired such confidence that the heavy draft horses and lumbering coach were daily growing heavier and sleeker and more lumbering than ever.

But it was neither the letter from Tatia nor the Villa Fontana that she looked for when listening to the click of the gardener's sabots returning from the village post-office. What would his answer be? Did she really wish him to yield to reason? Sometimes, sitting under the sycamores listening to the river-talk, a pang of rebellious unreason shot through the heart of her joy, echo of some cave woman carried away through the forest when reason was not yet born and passion was omnipotent. It was a transient pang, not even accorded acknowledgment, as foolish as Jack's threat to emulate Lochinvar. Dear Jack — what a silly boy he was!

And all this while Madame de Chavigny was silently renewing her youth, biding her time, awaiting the day she had planned for, when Jean should come, and from her window she should

see two dear forms walking down the path to the sycamores to confer together, and all these perplexing questions should be settled forever.

Then, one evening, answering Jacques's cry of terror, Helen rushed to her grandmother's room. She was sitting in her chair, ready for bed, a telegram in her fallen hand.

Local science pronounced it heart-failure — and so, in truth, it was.

Book III

XXXII

"JACK, you must have another pair of riding-breeches — those are disgraceful."

Stretched full length on the thin brown grass, Jack rolled over lazily. Although unable to survey the offending parts, he admitted that they were "rather far gone; but," he added ruefully, "they will have to go till next pay-day."

"Is Mr. Fearing as strict as that?" asked Helen.

"It is n't up to Mr. Fearing; it's up to me," replied Jack. "After we agreed on what was a fair allowance he had nothing more to do with it. I found that out when we had our first dance at school. I had to have some gloves, but I was broke — so I had them charged. They sent the bill to Mr. Fearing and he would n't pay it. I told him I *had* to have them. He said no one had to have luxuries he could n't pay for."

Helen laughed. "What do you do when you go over to see that pretty girl at the Rosario ranch?" she asked, surveying the demoralized breeches.

"I sit tight and I back out," said Jack grimly.

There was nothing anywhere in sight except the low fringe of cottonwoods where the river ran, and in the west, if one shaded one's eyes and looked hard, the faint blur of smoke marking the spot which Jack called 'home.' It was home to

her now. She had learned to love it. All the turmoil of the world, even its pain, was lost in these wide, silent expanses. Somewhere beyond that horizon melting into the level plain was Tatia, the white château facing the meadows, its shutters closed now, and olives and oleanders beside the blue sea — all distinct, but unbelievable, like the vision of some other incarnation opening in a dream.

"Do you think Mr. Fearing would disapprove if I made you a present of a pair?"

"Approve! You have n't got to get his approval."

No, she knew that.

"Besides," Jack went on, unmindful of what he suggested, "when he sent me a whole box of gloves Christmas and I told him I did n't see the difference between that and paying the bill, he said, business and sentiment must be kept strictly apart. Could n't you charge them to sentiment?"

Helen made no reply. She was thinking how little he had ever kept business and sentiment apart since that first day when he took Jack's hand walking to the St. Louis bridge — of how little, too, she had cared then for any one's approval but her own.

"Could n't you?"

She stopped thinking. "There is n't a great deal of sentiment in a pair of riding-breeches," she said, coming back to the present.

"I wish he were here," muttered Jack irrelevantly.

"Am I such a poor substitute?"

He thought a moment before answering. "You're a good thing, Helen, but you're not the same thing."

She laughed once more, this time at his candor. "You have changed since you threatened to carry me off like Lochinvar — do you remember?"

"I don't believe I ever said anything so silly," he retorted.

"Oh, yes you did. You should n't forget what you say to ladies. Do you forget what you say to the young lady over at Rosario, too?"

Jack flushed. "Helen, you are getting to be a regular tease. Who is there but Hilda to ride with!"

"No one but me — which, however good a thing, is n't the same thing, is it?"

Jack became suddenly sober. "Don't you think Hilda is rather nice?"

"Very."

There was a pause. He seemed unable to follow up the admission, though it evidently gave him pleasure. Looking down at the boy sprawling at her feet, his sunburned face turned to the sky, she tried to picture that other boy in knickerbockers with whom she used to play in the flowered paths of the Villa Fontana. Ages past, those days! When they spoke of them it was as of another

existence. But changed as he was, he was the same frank, affectionate Jack.

Of course she was only teasing, though she meant what she had said. Hilda *was* nice. Her family was of Danish origin, but Hilda, born in the foothills of the Rockies, was unmistakably American, a native graft on the old stock, hardy as the silver firs, with the color of the ruby kinglets in her cheeks. She had been away visiting relatives during Helen's first summer on the ranch, and only of late had any relations been established between "Rosario" and "Fearing's." Even in these outskirts of civilization it was tacitly understood that while the inmates of "Fearing's" were no better than any one else, there was a difference. Invisible barriers of this sort, however, were nothing to Jack.

There had been a mail that morning and among its letters was one from Tatia, now in long-coveted Petersburg — one of Tatia's searching, probing letters straight from the heart and taking many things for granted. "One's best possessions," she wrote, "are a dreadful drag. If it were not for that Jack of yours you would be with me here in Petersburg, and but for this Dimitri of mine I should be in the saddle with you on the plains — but, otherwise, your America is no place for me. It's for the young or the rich — I am neither, and you, alas! are both. What are you going to do with yourself when summer is over

and Jack goes back to school?" It was exuberance of life chiefly, rather than tact, which kept all allusions to the past out of Tatia's letters. Her eyes were always on the future.

What *was* she going to do when the summer was over?

"Jack."

The seriousness in her voice made him look up.

"Have you ever thought of what you are to do when you are a man — after college, I mean?"

The answer came prompt and masterful. "Look after you."

"Yes, dear, I understand that." It always pleased her to find herself first in his thought. Just now hers had wandered back to Hilda. "But some day I shall not be enough. Some day you will marry and have a home of your own."

When translated into words her thought startled her. She was not thinking of Hilda specifically now. Hilda was even more of a child than Jack, and had only started a train of thought. The possibility it first had hinted seemed so bald when spoken!— too momentous and too ridiculously distant for discussion. To her relief it made no impression on Jack.

"That won't make any difference," he said carelessly, "any more than if you did." And both contingencies glided from his mind as too remote for serious consideration. "When I get through

school Mr. Fearing says I can go into the office for a year — till I get my bearings."

"Would you like to?"

"Well, I've got to learn how to take care of your money. A woman can't do that, and you can't expect Mr. Fearing to be doing it forever."

"Did Mr. Fearing say that?"

"No, — but he said a year of business training before college was worth two after. Come," he said, getting up and shaking the sand from his clothes, "we had better be starting for home or we shall be late to supper."

He gave her his hand, swinging her lightly to her saddle, and the ponies shuffled off in their foxtrot, breaking finally into a gallop.

"I remember," he laughed as they pulled up, the ponies panting, at a prairie pool, "you turned up your nose at grub when you first came out last year. Now you grovel for it like the rest of us."

She smiled assent, out of breath, her cheeks hot with the long run, the wind in her blowing hair. She *was* hungry.

As they neared the ranch among the cottonwoods and willows, the dogs gave them welcome, sniffing suspiciously at the ponies' heels and lying down again satisfied. There was barely time to get out of her riding-clothes before supper was ready.

During this process her thought reverted to Tatia's letter, to its closing and only reference to

Mr. Fearing. "I assume he is alive," Tatia wrote, "though you make no mention of the fact and he never writes. He evidently assumes *we* are dead" — Tatia was prodigal with underlining emphasis. "If by any chance you should see him in the course of your *business* relations, say to him I am willing to forgive his *neglect* and *inconsiderate* behavior at the first sign of repentance."

Inconsiderate! How little Tatia knew! In those days of misery when her one longing had been for Jack, she had cabled him. The answer came back: "All preparations made. Cable steamer." Jack was on the ranch then, but he was waiting for her on the dock, and they left together, they two alone, the same day for the West. It was all exactly as she had wished. The wound was raw then, and he had not touched it.

Neglect! Jack himself was astonished at certain transformations at the ranch wrought in his brief absence. Before sitting down to supper she made a mental catalogue of facts wherewith to refute Tatia's unjust allegations. They were about her on every side. She had dismounted at the broad verandah added to the ranch the year before. She had had her plunge in the deep swimming-pool among the box alders where a screen had been arranged for her special use. And she was dressing in the master's room, somewhat incongruously adorned with feminine chintz and masculine game trophies. There was other material

in plenty for Tatia — almost too much. To-night its volume oppressed her, as if it were something its recipient should be ashamed to acknowledge, and sitting out on the verandah after Jack had gone to bed she decided that Tatia's charges were too absurd for refutation — which was a great disappointment to Tatia.

Curled up asleep after their evening meal, the dogs were so many dark patches at her feet. They were very friendly with her, though behaving scandalously with each other. She knew them all individually, distinct as each was in canine characteristics. Her favorite, proud of his distinction, had his head at that moment on her foot, as if conscious of protection from his wiser brethren. Jack had named him Clown, for he was a young dog with much to learn, and the occasional whine with which he answered the wail of a prowling coyote was proof that he had not yet mastered interest for the lesser game his elders had been taught to despise. He had no scars to show as they had, but a twitching limb and low growl told he was already earning them in his dreams.

What was she going to do with the coming winter? It was not so far away now. The grass was drying up, the flowers were gone, the songs of the mocking-birds and rose finches in the river bottom were over, the plain, flooded by the moon, would soon be white with snow, and at night the north wind from the dark line of piñons and

cedars on the far slopes of the foothills sounded its crisp note of warning. Last year, when the season ended, she had taken a furnished house with her English maid in the village near Jack's school. That did not appeal to her now, though she felt she must be near Jack. The years had wrought their change in her. A stronger pulse throbbed in her veins. She would have liked to stay where she was, but without Jack that was impossible. Dear possessions, as Tatia had said, made a difference.

In her lap was another letter, from Mrs. Stuart, who had taken a house-boat in Florida for the winter and begged her to join their "strictly family party." By far the greater part of this letter was devoted to the news of the arrival of a little girl. "She is a perfect darling," Madge wrote, "and we want to name her Helen" — for occult reasons not committed to paper — "do you mind?" No, Helen did not mind. She had no intention of accepting the invitation to Florida, but she had changed the opinion she had formed of Mrs. Stuart that day at Célestin's. Madge had written on her return from Egypt offering to come to Touraine "if desired"; otherwise she would send certain things she thought belonged to her, Helen, rather than to Monsieur de Trécourt's family. It was the first intimation Helen had had of the part Mrs. Stuart had played in Cairo, and she had said, "Come"; not so much because of

anything in Mrs. Stuart's letter as of some very flattering things the English doctor had written about her — praise which would have gratified that lady greatly had she been privileged to read it.

There had been nothing offensive or obtrusive about her visitor. She had not offered any consolation, or descanted on the healing properties of time, or referred, as the Villa Fontana did, to the mysterious ways of an overruling Providence. She had simply and naturally told the things Helen wanted to hear.

Helen had been prepared by the doctor's letter to receive Mrs. Stuart kindly, and Madge was the only person in the world who could tell her all she longed to know — the woman who had stood in her place. But she was not prepared for the transformation of the shallow, pert visitor of the Avenue Montaigne into this friend whose sincerity and comprehending reserves disarmed any dread she had felt in looking forward to this interview. Madge seemed to have undergone a moral regeneration. How or why it had come to pass Helen did not in the least understand. They had sat together a long hour under the sycamores, and after Madge had gone, she found in the sealed envelope the "certain things" — her own letter to Jean and a few withered violets. She understood no better now, as the memory of that hour came back to her over the years, but it touched

her that this woman whom she had misjudged, who had stood by his bedside and ministered in her stead, should wish to link her with her own intimate life through her child. How little, after all, she thought, we know each other — or ourselves.

Presently, from around the corner of the ranch came Stone, the manager. He veered away on seeing her, but she called to him, and he sat down on the edge of the verandah. The night was growing chilly, and his buckskin jacket was buttoned to the throat. Buttoning and unbuttoning this jacket, or loosening and tightening the blue spotted handkerchief knotted at his throat, were the only visible changes in his toilet she had ever been able to discover.

"You need n't give up your pipe, Stone," she said, "I like it. It won't be long before we are leaving you."

"No, marm, and the best of the year coming."

"Is it? I really should like to stay and see."

"There's nothing to hinder at this end, Miss Lee. We could make you as comfortable as a kitten by the fire."

He spoke quite confidently, as if weather were the only consideration.

"You see Jack must be back for school."

Instantly Stone saw a boy on a revolving stool at a high desk.

"Which is cruelty to animals," he remarked laconically.

"But Jack has to be something more than an animal," laughed Helen.

Stone smoked on reflectively. "I've lived among 'em most of my life," he said at length, "and as between the general run of men, of what you might call civilized men," he qualified, "I prefer most animals. Now you take that dog resting on your foot, I reckon he'd die for you—and he's a fool dog at that."

Helen stooped to pat the long, silky ears. Clown, dreaming, rolled over unresponsive.

"Not all your animals, Stone, would be so companionable as Clown."

"No, marm, that's my point. They all speak out their natural feelings. You can depend upon them for that."

"But is n't it lonely when the snow comes?" she asked, after a pause.

Stone chuckled. "You may not believe it, but the loneliest man I ever knew was a man by the name of Stone in the crowd on Broad Street." He pressed the tobacco down in the bowl of his pipe. "When a man gets to be so busy that he has to wire me to come clear to New York for a ten minutes' conversation I go away thinking."

"Thinking of what?"

"That I'd be mighty glad to get back where there's nobody disputing the air I'm breathing.

We're tolerably full of business ourselves out here most of the time, but we've got elbow-room to do it in."

"What did he wire you for, Stone?"

"Oh, just to know first-hand how things were going on."

"Nothing in particular, then."

"No, marm, nothing in particular. Stop your noise, Clown. You ain't chasing no coyote."

"Is Mr. Fearing coming out this fall?"

"Maybe. He used to come regular. I reckon the ranch has got to be a kind of plaything, such as children get tired of. The last he wrote he said he might be out in the fall — after you'd gone."

Helen was silent.

"If you'll excuse me for saying so, had n't you better go inside? There's a fire lit. The nights get sorter biting when the moon comes up."

"Yes. Good-night, Stone."

"Good-night, marm," he said, rising.

Clown rose, too, and after standing with his nose to the door till convinced it was not to open again, flopped down beside Stone. He laid his big hand on the dog's flank, gathering up the loose young skin in his grip, till the dog whined. "We know one as will miss her, don't we," he said.

For answer Clown sat up, shaking his skin into place, to observe the refilling and lighting of the pipe, warily, his head askew.

"You're no such fool dog as they make out,"

said Stone to himself. "You know more than the whole pack."

Clown watched the spark of the match as it sailed out over his sleeping kin, then lay down on the doormat.

Two weeks later the moon was gone. So had what Stone called Helen's kit, on the long trail to the nearest railway station — when Jack, who had ridden over to Rosario to make his formal bow of farewell, reined up before the verandah in the dark.

"Helen, come in, quick — I want to speak to you."

He led the way to her room, closing the door behind them. She saw that he was trembling.

"What's the matter, Jack dear?"

"Helen" — his voice broke — "I've kissed her — I did n't mean to — we could n't help it — we went for a ride — just a little one — for the last time — and the pony stumbled in a badger hole — I caught her — and then — I could n't let go — can't you understand —"

Yes, she understood. The irrevocable had happened.

"I've got to tell Mr. Fearing — what do you think he'll say — you'll stand by me, won't you, Helen —"

She took his hands in hers. "You really love her, Jack?"

"More than anything else in the world." She understood that, too. "And we are going to-morrow," he groaned.

"We need n't go to-morrow, dear. We will stay another day, and I'll ride over to Rosario with you."

"Oh, Helen," he cried, flinging his arms around her, "what a brick you are — you're the dearest girl in the world — I knew you would." And they talked together as they used to do, far into the night.

At the door he held her close. He could feel her heart beating against his own, and confession had made him bold.

"Helen, you know we said once we would never have any secrets from each other." She drew a quick breath. "But we have." She made an effort to free herself, but he held her the closer. "You remember the night I came back from our automobile excursion — when I went over to see you — that was the first time. I did n't know what it was. I was awfully glad to see you, and when I kissed you — Do you remember those things in grandmamma's garden that curled up when we touched them? You curled up, drew back, I mean, just as they did. I did n't understand why — I only felt it. Afterwards, I understood. You don't mind my speaking about it, do you?"

She shook her head.

"Then, on the train, when we said good-bye, I told you I wished it was Mr. Fearing. You thought I was crazy — yes, you did — I was n't. I've had a secret, too, from you — you're sure you don't mind my speaking of it?"

"No."

The strange thing was that he was riding roughshod over her heart of hearts, and it did not hurt.

"I don't know *how* I knew it — but I know he loved you then —"

"Oh, no, Jack, not then —"

"I don't blame him. How could he help it!" He tilted up the head on his shoulder till he could look squarely into the eyes. "Be honest, Helen — if you did n't know then you know now."

"Yes, Jack, I do know now."

"I thought perhaps that — that you thought — that because he stayed away so, he did n't —"

"Don't, Jack, please —"

His hand was under her chin still. "Helen, you love him" — the joy in his voice matched her shining eyes — "you might as well own up to it — then why don't you tell him — Hilda did."

"Oh, Jack," she cried, yielding herself to his pressure, "what a dear goose you are."

He laughed triumphantly. "I'm glad I am. I hate secrets. What are you crying for?"

She pushed him gently out the door and began to undress. What was she crying for? Was it because all the fulness and richness of life was

coming back? How could that be! What was this new, this alien joy, forcing its way up through the wreck of her spring world? or was it the same unconquerable hunger of the heart, crushed underfoot like a growing thing, yet refusing to die till satisfied? To be beloved! Did that suffice? Was that enough to deaden memory, to put grieving to sleep, to create her anew? It seemed as if some unpitying hand were blotting out her past while she stood by unprotesting, unmoved.

He had said once he was a little afraid of her. The words had carried no meaning then, except to bring a smile. She knew their meaning now, had known it for a long time — knew that at the bottom of that fear was constant care and thoughtfulness. It was not fear. It was what a woman prizes above life. How should she let him know that she knew, that she so prized it — without shame for the unforgotten past? She could not understand herself — would he? Was she beginning to be afraid of him?

Sleep answered none of these questions, taught her no self-understanding. In the night nothing happened. But riding over with Jack to Rosario in the brilliant sunshine and the bracing morning air, the world seemed good to live in. It was strange, it was new — but it was real.

XXXIII

JACK's letter to Mr. Fearing was one of those effusions which make the reader weep or smile according to temperament and experience. Fearing had no hesitancy as to his answer. Spring floods brook no dam. One can only wait to see whether the sources hold out or fail. He did not suggest the latter alternative, a useless procedure in flood-time and a belated one when the river-bed is dry. His reply, couched in the friendly terms which characterized all their relations, satisfied Jack. If he felt any disappointment it was that so momentous an event should cause so slight a ripple.

Helen's explanatory pages were more troublesome. He had told her once he was a little afraid of her. The truth was he was now afraid of himself. But for Tatia's pseudo-fainting fit he might never have acknowledged what that unguarded moment had wrung from him when he saw Helen slipping out of his life, as he thought then forever. Fate had brought her back, bruised and inaccessible, a wounded thing to care for, to shield from himself — from the hunger which came with her loss and which she only could appease. He could not live without it. He clung to it while holding it at bay. For he loved her, and therefore wanted her — and it was no spring flood.

"Hilda is a very unusual girl," wrote Helen, 'standing by' Jack. "I do not say this out of loyalty to my brother. My only thought is, as yours will be, do they really know their own hearts? I wish you could see her. We are leaving to-day for St. Luke's, and I shall stay there till Jack is settled. Afterwards — could you lend me Peter? I suppose there are other Peters to be had, but I do not know them. I want to go off somewhere and think."

Lend her Peter! He had been racking his brain for two years to find ways to do for her. This was the first time she had asked for anything. He wrote at once.

"I think we —" she noticed the 'we' and smiled at the infelicity which followed — "had better seize the bull by the horns. I am going to London for a month, perhaps longer. Why won't you take my house at Sandhurst while I am away, till your winter plans are made, and ask Hilda to spend the month with you? The housekeeper, Willis, is a good sort, and you will find Peter there. I hope Hilda's grammar is good. Jack speaks only of minor qualifications. I have written him by this mail to stick to his books. His last year's report showed he was first in athletics — in other things rather close to the danger-line." Then, with some misgivings, he indulged in a postscript. "I hope this will appeal to you, and to Hilda. I should like to see her." He read so much more

into both letter and postscript that he posted them without re-reading, lest a rising fear of gambling with fate should get the better of him.

As the day of sailing drew near without a reply, he concluded postscript and all were a mistake, and the pilot, dropping into his boat off Sandy Hook, left ship and life empty. But on the way to his room he met the mail clerk with a letter. How did she know he was sailing by that steamer? He had not mentioned it. And why had she not addressed it to the office as she invariably did? Between a steamer and an office letter was all the difference between the personal and the impersonal. It was a very brief letter. It contained no reference to Sandhurst, nor to Hilda — except to assure him he would find her grammar excellent. Its brevity and silences were a contradiction of her habitual straightforwardness. Was it merely to thank him for lending her Peter, and was Sandhurst so out of the question as not even to merit mention? He argued these questions pro and con all the way from Sandy Hook to Fastnet.

In London he did an impulsive thing entirely foreign to his nature. He wrote Murray Brothers to send the parcel in their keeping to Tatia. There was not the slightest justification for making such a gift to Tatia. Undoubtedly she would be stunned. He was not considering what the effect on Tatia would be. He was only burying the past a little deeper, and in the small circle of his

acquaintances among the other sex Tatia was the only grave available.

Coming on deck the first morning of the homeward voyage, he saw a short, thick-set man jump from a chair, and the familiar words: "Well, by all the gods, if it is n't Fearing!" halted him like a blow in the face.

Wrapped below the waist in a steamer rug from which she emerged like a flower from its sheath in most bewitching attire, Mrs. Stuart smiled up at him pleasantly.

He made an effort to be cordial to Jim, who, after his first explosion of glad surprise, explained that they were bound for Florida — never had been there — Madge's idea — anything better than London in winter — had no idea he was on board.

Into this torrent of words broke Madge's thin voice. "You have n't had your morning cigar yet, Jim. Give Mr. Fearing your chair. I want to talk to him."

Taken aback in the midst of his flow of spirits, Jim looked at his wife enquiringly.

"You can come back in half an hour," she said with sweet decision.

Jim nodded, the expression on his face merging from surprise to one of previous and complete agreement. All he really understood was that whatever Madge wished to confide to Fearing would be confided to him later.

"You need n't be afraid," said Madge to Fearing as Jim turned away; "I'm clothed and in my right mind."

Fearing knew Jim thoroughly. He was as transparent and as translucent as a window pane. Looking down on Madge, he marvelled at the variety in her, the confusing metamorphoses of the eternally unchanging feminine.

"You really had better sit down. I can't talk up to you."

Fearing sat down on the extension of the chair. His was a forgiving nature. While Madge had once stung him to fury, he remembered her malice had been grounded in fact.

"You need n't be cross with me," she said, lowering her voice; "I'm not cross with you, though I have every reason to be, for you were nasty to me in Paris, when I was right and you were — shall we say evasive? But we won't rake up old grudges and you need n't look so solemn. I want to show you Helen."

Fearing started. They were Tatia's words.

"Men hate babies, I know," she smiled, turning to the chair beside her, unwrapping a fluffy roll in the arms of a nurse and disclosing a pink face and two starry blue eyes, "but is n't she a perfect darling? And the very image of Jim — which is too funny for words, for you know Jim never cared for children."

Having achieved what was at once a diversion

and an introduction, she covered up the pink morsel and unwound the rug from her own feet.

"But that's not what I wanted to talk to you about. Give me your hand, please, and we'll go over by the rail."

"If you wish me to talk —"

"You need n't. You can listen. A lot of water you know nothing about has run under the mill since you lost your temper." She leaned over the rail, looking down at the racing foam. "I admit I was a bit nasty, too. She rubbed me the wrong way. I thought she was proud, supercilious, and that night at the station when I saw her —"

"We won't discuss that, Madge."

She looked up quickly. "Well, what would *you* have thought in my place? What *did* you think? That it was a lie or a mistake, of course — but it worried you, and I meant it should. But that's past history. Now I'm going to tell you something else I did that was nastier" — her perfect assurance and innocent blue eyes were stupefying. "Did you know I was in Cairo when Trécourt died? No, I thought not. Well, I was. I went to the hospital out of common decency, and I stayed" — her eyes dropped to the racing bubbles again, and her voice trailed off brokenly — "out of — call it pity — or remorse — a mere boy, babbling out his poor heart to me in delirium — to me, of all persons! *He* was worried, — that was how I knew you were, that your telegram was an after-

thought. Then came a letter — from her. I took it to him. He died with it in his hand. Afterwards I took it to her — but I read it first. It was n't fair. I read the first sentence to see what it was — after that I defy any woman to have kept from reading the rest." The pink deepened on her cheeks and the hardness in her voice softened. "You think I ought to be ashamed to confess it. I am not. It did me such a lot of good. Don't you think it's rather nice of me to own I needed it?" The faint, ironic smile in her eyes saved her speech from coquetry. He would not answer, and she continued. "It was such a pitiful letter — like a mother's, torn in two between love and duty — she called it reason. It made me feel naked. That's what I meant just now when I said I was clothed and in my right mind. I don't know whether she knew I read it or not — I think she did — and I don't care. If she knew, she understood —"

"Understood what?"

She made a despairing gesture. "I can't get down on my hands and knees to you. If she did n't understand, she would if she knew. I can't make it any plainer. She let me name my baby Helen. Being a rather stupid man, you probably think that was a whim on my part. It was n't, and I don't believe she thought so. You ought not to be so very cross with me if I cared enough for her to ask that."

"I am not cross with you at all," he said.

"Nor for speaking?"

"No."

"Then I'll say something else." She squared her back to the rail, looking up at him humorously. "I suppose you call yourself a successful man. How a man who has been as successful as you have been can be such a fool about some things passes belief. I was right in Paris, in spite of all your fine denials, and I am right now. Any one can see that." She caught the warning expression on his face. "Fudge! Men think a woman has to be told. Women wait to be told because it's conventional and agreeable, but it's entirely superfluous — so far as knowing is concerned."

She crossed the deck to her chair, and Jim, in the door of the smoking-room, judging the parley was over, sauntered down between them.

"I have been showing him Helen," said Madge, smiling brightly.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Jim good-naturedly. "I expected as much. Madge bores every one to death about that kid of hers. I shall be lucky if I have a friend left. I'm damned glad to see you, Fearing. What do you say to a walk?"

"You did n't have a row with Fearing, did you, Madge?" Jim asked afterwards.

"Row! How ridiculous!"

"He was glum as an oyster."

"I did give him something to think of, but I don't believe it made him glum."

For the remainder of the voyage she was tactful enough not to renew their conversation. She had had her say. But coming up the bay on the last day he joined her at the rail, and she knew from his manner he had something to say to her. The towering windows above the Battery were a blaze of light. She made no distracting remarks, conscious that his mind was not on the view.

"Madge, I am very likely all you say I am, but I can't make myself over. I must be myself. The worst mistakes of my life were those in which I tried to be somebody else."

She nodded. Then, after a silence: "It's not you I am worrying about. But don't tempt me to meddle with you. I should add a heaping tablespoonful of self-conceit — and that might spoil you."

His secretary was at the landing-stage with letters. He glanced them over. Nothing. The crowded pier seemed lonely.

"There's no large luggage," he said, giving his keys, "and nothing to declare. I shall go to the Club to-night and be at the office in the morning."

He was looking about for Jack, who never let slip an opportunity of this sort to break away from school fetters. Was Jack growing wiser and steadier? So much the better! And the loneliness deepened.

Halfway down the pier-shed he saw Peter.

"What are you doing here, Peter?" he asked.

"Waiting for you, sir."

"You came in from Sandhurst?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did Willis send you?" Willis ought to know better. Willis knew he always went to the Club.

"No, sir; Miss Lee did."

"You can wait for my luggage, Peter." He strove to ask no more questions, to keep his voice natural. "Where is the car?"

"Just outside, sir — opposite."

He stepped into the telephone booth and called up Sandhurst.

"Is that you, Willis?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can I speak to Miss Lee?"

"Good Lord, sir! I hope nothing has happened. She's not here, sir — she — "

"Not there —"

"No, sir. I told her as how you always went to the Club, but she would order the motor. She started —"

He hung up the receiver. He was trembling like a child. Beyond the gate the dock was jammed with trucks and motors. He forced his way between them to the limousine on the opposite side of the street — Peter always managed to be first in line — and turned the handle of the door.

"Helen —"

He spoke into the darkness as if no one was there. He could not believe it.

"Yes — it's Helen."

Even now, holding her in his arms, he refused to believe —holding her off, to read it in her eyes.

"You asked me to come—I have come to stay."

He caught her to him again, their breaths mingling. The eyes closed again with a long sigh of submission.

"Don't, dear," she murmured.

It was seventy miles to Sandhurst.

Willis was at the door as the warning bell rang from the lodge-gate. Helen fled past her through the hall and up the stairs before a word was spoken. Something seemed to have ruffled Willis's temper.

"You'll be staying here to-night, then," she said in answer to Fearing's welcome.

"No, not to-night, Willis. I shall be out early in the morning."

"It's pretty nearly morning already," she said grimly. "I told Miss Lee —"

"It's all right, Willis."

"You won't have a bit of supper — of breakfast, I mean, sir?"

"No, thanks."

"Not even a cup of tea, sir?" She was following him down the steps. "I put Miss Lee in the

west wing, and the young lady — being timid-like — next her in —"

"Quite right, Willis, good-night."

The motor started. She watched its red light as it sped down the driveway.

"I don't blame him for being vexed," she muttered wrathfully. "Folks as don't know other folks' habits are always interfering. Think of dragging him out here at past midnight — and he so good-natured — for nothing!"

She closed the door with a bang, locked it, and began to turn out the lights.

In far-away Petersburg Tatia, opening a sealed package from Murray Brothers, was at that moment very near to fainting in dead earnest, for Tatia was an excellent judge of pearls and quick in jumping to conclusions. She shared them with Dimitri and Alexis on the instant without waiting for confirmation.

Dimitri said nothing.

Alexis drew a long breath.

"What are you thinking of, Alexis?" Tatia challenged.

"I was thinking of that poor boy in Egypt. We seem to have forgotten him."

Tatia kindled. "We forget nothing that is *real*," she said — "nor refuse it either."

THE END

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